

*Introduction to the Philosophy  
of St. Thomas Aquinas*

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Introduction to  
the Philosophy of  
St. Thomas Aquinas

III. PSYCHOLOGY

*Translated by John A. Otto, PH. D.*

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# IMPRIMATUR

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## Foreword

† IN Aristotle's view the study of the soul is an integral part of the investigation of nature, in a way a preliminary to biology. We need not wonder, then, that Aristotle devotes comparatively small consideration to the operations of our highest, that is, our spiritual faculties, intellect and will. St. Thomas, whose almost every philosophical inquiry is undertaken in furtherance of a theological matter, gives much more attention to this part of his psychology. We shall follow his example. Believing, moreover, that the detailed analysis of the operations of the will is more suitably left to moral philosophy, we shall devote the greater part of our consideration of the spiritual soul to matters pertaining to the intellect. Indeed, it may well seem that we have given more space to problems of the intellect than one should expect in an introductory study. We felt it necessary, however, to go into some detail on several points, not only because they are too important to be dismissed with generalities, but also because for the most part they are too summarily treated in other manuals of comparable scope and purpose.

Aristotelian psychology—perhaps “anthropology” or the sci-



ence of the human organism would be more exact—centers around the well-known affirmation that the soul is the form of the body. Its main preoccupation lies in determining the relationship between the two basic realities of which man is constituted. We have endeavored, on our part, to give this question the emphasis it deserves; above all, we have tried to make it very clear that in one way or another all of man's activity depends on this body-soul relationship.

Still, it must be admitted that to define the soul as the form of the body does not tell the whole story of man's nature, since the soul of man is not merely a form, but a form that can exist by itself. A pneumatology, if that is the word, or a science of spiritual being would therefore seem to be a necessary complement to the hylomorphic consideration of the soul, seeing that the study of the soul as form retains a strong biological impress to the end. In this additional undertaking Aristotle was both halting and obscure. St. Thomas was in a more favorable position, having before him the example of St. Augustine, himself the beneficiary of all those new discoveries of the soul made, or made possible, by revealed truth. St. Thomas, therefore, presents a forthright doctrine of *mens* or spirit as such, together with its unique powers and activities, like the power to reflect on and know itself, indirectly in its present condition, but directly and without intervening medium in the future state of separation from the body. This is the reason why we have stressed such matters as the knowledge by which the soul knows itself through itself, and the knowledge it has in the state of separation. Such questions together with their answers open up new vistas, reaching far beyond the horizons of Peripateticism.

But the psychology of St. Thomas goes even further, looking to the world beyond for the light that will discover the innermost structure of the human soul, for it is the light of revelation that discloses the mark of divine resemblance in the soul's being. Though more reserved than St. Bonaventure, who con-

strues many aspects of man as the image of God, St. Thomas nevertheless believes that the ultimate explanation of our being lies in its being kindred with God. *Homo ad imaginem Dei factus*: man is made to the image of God. These, it should be remembered, are the words with which St. Thomas introduces his prologue to the *Prima Secundae*, in which he treats of the rational creature's return to his Principle and Beginning.

†

## Acknowledgments

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The English version of quotations and selections from St. Thomas are reprinted, by kind permission of their respective publishers, from the following translated writings of St. Thomas: *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947. Reprinted with the permission of Benziger Brothers, Inc., publishers and copyright owners); *Contra Gentiles*, trans. by the English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., 1929); *The Soul*, trans. by John P. Rowan (St. Louis: B. Herder Co., 1949); *On the Power of God*, trans. by the English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1952); and *Truth*, trans. by Robert W. Mulligan, S.J., James V. McGlynn, S.J., and Robert W. Schmidt, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952 ff.). To all the aforesaid publishers, and to the translators of their aforementioned publications, the present translator hereby acknowledges his great debt and deep appreciation.

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*Introduction to the Philosophy  
of St. Thomas Aquinas*

III. PSYCHOLOGY



## † CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

### I. GENERAL NOTION OF PSYCHOLOGY

† ETYMOLOGICALLY, psychology means “the science of the soul.” This science is as old as philosophy itself. Every great system of philosophy, from the beginning to the present, has dealt explicitly with this subject, containing a more or less clearly defined presentation of matters relating to it. But if the science is old, the word is comparatively new, tracing back not further than the sixteenth century, when a Marburg professor, Goclenius, used it to title one of his works. The credit, however, for bringing the word into general use would seem to go to another German, Christian Wolff (1679-1754). With his *Psychologia Empirica* (experimental psychology), published in 1732, and his *Psychologia Rationalis* (rational psychology), published in 1734, he popularized not only the word “psychology” but also a distinction that was to have a long career. Kant, for example, made use of the same terminology.

During the course of the nineteenth century the word and the distinction became popular in France as well, gaining general ac-

ceptance through a development in which the influence of Maine de Biran (1766–1824) and the French Rationalists and Eclectics was decisive. Thus, on the whole and by a strange paradox, the word “psychology” comes into its own at the very moment when, in large measure, those who profess to deal with the subject deny the very possibility of any knowledge of the soul itself. In these circumstances we may ask what meaning this term conveys in the vocabulary of one who intends to direct his philosophical inquiry along the paths followed by St. Thomas. Before answering this question, however, we ought to review the principal historical movements regarding the doctrine of the soul, for the answer is best seen against its historical background.

### 1. *Historical Survey*

Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages there were two main schools of thought regarding the soul. One was the more spiritualist view, taught by Plato and St. Augustine; the other a more empirical view, represented by Aristotle and his followers. In the thirteenth century, as is well known, it was the latter doctrine that came to prevail, as did the rest of the philosophy of the Stagirite. Ever since, Christian philosophy in the main has been Aristotelian.

With the birth of modern thought the psychology of the Schoolmen, together with everything that came from Aristotle, fell into disesteem. But the science of the soul could not lie entombed forever; men felt the need to resurrect it. One of the first to make the attempt was Descartes (1596–1650), who revived the excessively spiritualist view of the Augustinian school, which leaned toward excluding the body in the study of the soul. But Descartes was also something of an innovator in the field by making reflection upon self the basic principle or starting point of all knowledge. From then on, the term “psychological” tended more and more to mean “accessible to consciousness.” Nevertheless, the substance of Cartesian psychology remained essentially meta-

physical in character; its principal object of inquiry was still the soul itself, that is, the essential nature of its being.

In the eighteenth century, owing to the influence of John Locke (1632–1704), a new step was taken, one that aimed at complete elimination of traditional metaphysical considerations from the science of the soul. Psychological facts were now reduced to purely observable phenomena, behind which the soul and its powers lay, it was thought, inaccessible. Psychology sought to become a purely empirical science, comparable to other sciences of nature; its domain was confined to consciousness, that is, to what was obtainable by direct conscious experience.

Following the method of appeal to consciousness and empirical inquiry, psychological research made great strides. Even though metaphysical speculations regarding the spiritual were not wholly neglected—witness, for example, Lachelier (1832–1918) or Bergson (1859–1941) in France—the main concern of psychologists was to establish an independent and scientific psychology from which the higher problems of the soul and its destiny were to be excluded. The remarkable progress that had been made by the experimental sciences seemed to justify even the fondest hopes of like success in psychology. Since it was possible to systematize and interpret the findings of physical science according to strictly scientific methods, why should it not be possible to do likewise with findings of the mind? Away with, or let others wrangle about questions of the soul and its faculties, and, for that matter, about the essence of material things. Keep to the observation of precise facts and to the formulation of carefully controlled laws. In this way, it was thought, you would achieve a psychology that was truly scientific and objective, one that could rally the allegiance of all concerned. Roused by this promise, psychologists everywhere applied themselves intensively to the task of observation and experimentation, a task to which, it must be acknowledged, we are indebted for the imposing results that are the boast of the modern science of the soul. For all practical purposes, moreover, this



science has superseded the theoretical psychology of former times.

Still, it may be asked whether the hope of developing such a science is altogether justified; whether in the last analysis it is possible to establish a completely autonomous science of psychology. More precisely, is there any warrant for believing there can be a separate psychology conceived after the manner of the experimental sciences, which would be distinct but companion to the older metaphysical study of the soul, whose truth is perennial? This is the question that must now be answered.

## *2. Rational Psychology and Experimental Psychology*

Before the eighteenth century there was but one branch of systematic psychology, forming a part of an over-all philosophical program and treated according to the methods of philosophy. What are the characteristics of this psychology?

In the first place, the older psychology is definitely *philosophical* in character, in the sense that it seeks to determine the very first principles of life and its manifestations; in the sense also that it does not hesitate to make use of the more basic notions of Aristotelian philosophy, such as substance and accident, matter and form, act and potency. Secondly, this psychology deserves to be called *scientific* in the strict sense of the word, endeavoring as it does to explain things by their proper causes. Indeed, this is its main task, and therefore the work of observation and classification is only the preliminary step. Furthermore, despite its admittedly rational or theoretical bent, in its own way the older psychology is also *empirical*, not to say experimental. Aristotle, in particular, always begins with some well-defined datum of experience. As a matter of fact, the sort of sober empiricism in which the business of interpretation is but a continuation and judicious ordering of experience, strikes us as being the distinctive feature of Aristotelianism. According to this philosophy, then, there is but one science of the soul, which is both empirical and

rational. Are we to conclude, therefore, that the principles of this philosophy do not permit us to organize the science of psychology into two separate divisions, commonly called rational and empirical, or to treat one independently of the other? The answer to this question would seem to be no. At the present time, at any rate, such a division is more or less taken for granted. Nevertheless, one or two observations are in order.

For one thing, it should be clearly understood that the distinction of experimental and rational is only relative, thus indicating no more than the line of emphasis followed by one method as compared with the other. Consequently, the terminology of "rational" and "experimental" is, to say the least, unsatisfactory, for it opens the door wide to confusion. The fact is that no science of any kind is possible without *both* reason and experience. A much better course would be to distinguish these two disciplines in terms of the level of interpretation in which each is engaged. On the one hand we should have a philosophical or metaphysical psychology, which seeks to determine the highest principles of the science; on the other hand, a scientific psychology, scientific in the modern sense, which occupies itself with a more immediate level of interpretation. Furthermore, a so-called experimental psychology could in no way claim the role of ultimate arbiter in regard to the basic problems of the soul; it could not, in other words, pose as an authentic philosophical wisdom. Such a role rightfully belongs to a higher discipline.

## II. THE OBJECT AND METHOD OF PSYCHOLOGY

### 1. *The Object of Psychology*

The object, perhaps the twofold object (or precise scope of inquiry), that one will assign to psychology depends, of course, on the general tendency of one's philosophy. If, for example, we lean to the spiritualist view of St. Augustine or Descartes, we shall naturally incline to the position that the object of this sci-

Platonie  
 ence is the activity of the soul considered in itself, apart from any reference to the body. If, on the other hand, we are committed to the preconceptions of materialism, we shall be disposed to reduce the domain of psychology to the physiological, or even to the physical level. But if we adopt a middle ground, such as the moderate spiritualism of Aristotle, the object of psychology will include something of each of these divergent determinations. Our approach, it need hardly be said, is that of Aristotle. But even here two choices are possible.

a) *Mental life and life in general*.—In the view of Aristotle all manifestations of life can be called psychological facts; psychology would then be defined by life itself, and all living beings, including those below man, namely, animals and plants, would belong to the science of the soul. Following this view, one can say that the object of psychology is:

- 1) *the living being in so far as it is the principle of vital activities.*

The justification for this position lies in the basic Aristotelian classification of all activity into two main types: transitive and immanent. Transitive activity produces a change upon something other than the subject; whereas immanent activity originates in and works for the perfection of the subject. On the basis of this division, beings are nonliving if they have only transitive activities, and living if they are endowed with immanent activities, or can move themselves. Accordingly, a more precise determination of the object of psychology would be to define it as:

*those beings endowed with immanent activity or the power to move themselves, considered as such.*

With this, the scope of psychology is clearly marked off; only it leaves the difficulty, in some cases, of deciding whether a given operation is a vital activity or not.

b) *Psychology and consciousness*.—According to some schools



of modern psychologists, the domain of psychology is defined in somewhat different terms, namely, in terms of consciousness. As they see it, the proper scope of psychology is the realm of consciousness, or whatever is accessible to consciousness. It will be readily seen that in this conception one whole area of vital activity, the whole infraconscious realm, is eliminated from the scope of this science. Excluded, therefore, is the life of plants as well as certain aspects of animal and human life. In short, the object of psychology would be considerably restricted. 110

For our part we have no intention to deny that the fact of being conscious and self-reflective is one of the most striking characteristics on certain levels of vital activity. Nevertheless, with St. Thomas we believe that psychology should be defined with respect to vital activity as a whole, because the distinction of living and nonliving is more basic than that of conscious and nonconscious. Doing so, moreover, we are following in the footsteps of authentic Aristotelianism.

## 2. The Methods of Psychology

Since considerations of method are of little value previous to and apart from practical application, we shall limit ourselves to briefly clarifying two points.

a) Introspection and the objective method.—Like every science, psychology must be founded on the knowledge of facts. On this point the philosophy of Aristotle is in perfect agreement with the demands of modern science. But the facts of psychology, at least those occurring on a higher level, are unusual in that they can be obtained by two different methods: objectively, in so far as they are of a piece with the world perceived by the senses; and subjectively, in so far as they are conscious experiences. To this twofold approach to psychological facts correspond two methods, called objective and subjective.

The subjective method, also referred to as introspection, is peculiar to psychology. The ancients themselves used it, though

not so systematically as the moderns. Among the latter two contrary views regarding introspection have prevailed. Some deem it the only means of creating a genuine science of psychology; whereas others, more mindful of its rather elusive and subjective character, feel that it has little scientific value.

There is something to be said for each of these opinions, and the truth would seem to lie in between. Certainly, introspection must be acknowledged as a normal and reliable source of information for psychology, indeed as the chief means of investigating the whole field of higher activities. But because of the evanescent nature of conscious states, and the impossibility of submitting them to direct and exact measurement, the method of introspection carries with it a degree of uncertainty. In any event, it has always to be controlled and completed by objective information.

The objective methods include all those procedures by means of which life and its activities can be studied from the outside, as it were. Since mind is linked to matter and the mental to the physical, the life of the soul is reflected in actions and reactions of the body. Hence, there is no reason why the soul should not be studied through the medium of bodily activities. As for Aristotle himself, we may note that he would be the last to scorn this procedure. We shall, in fact, see that his initial approach to living things is precisely from the viewpoint that they are bodies, forming part of the physical universe, even as the material elements; his inner analysis of their specifically vital functions comes later. In this respect at least, Aristotelian psychology is abreast of the most up-to-date conceptions of that science. Doubtless, modern techniques leave the former far behind, but this is only a difference of degree. Methods are more refined, not basically different.

The truth of the matter is that psychology can employ both methods, both introspection and objective gathering of data, using—there is no reason why not—the most modern techniques



of experimentation. Nor is there any reason why, under proper conditions, it should not have recourse to the comparative or differential methods that have been made available, for example, by animal psychology, pathological psychology, and genetic psychology. The point we wish to make is simply that every source or method of information is legitimate, provided that it does not pretend to be the only one, and does not impose unfounded or unverifiable preconceptions.

b) *Philosophical method and theological method.*—In the philosophy of St. Thomas we face an additional question of method. Aristotle, as was but natural, developed his ideas within a purely philosophical framework. In his commentaries St. Thomas adopts the same point of view, but in his theological works the Angelic Doctor takes another line. To see the difference we have only to compare the procedure followed by Aristotle in the *De Anima* with the order followed, for example, in the great psychological treatise embodied in the *Prima Pars*, questions 75 to 89. The former work begins with the physical world, in which some bodies are found to have the remarkable property of being able to move themselves. These are living bodies, whose activities are then studied, beginning with the lowest to the highest, until we come to an activity that is absolutely independent of matter. With this activity, which is thought, we stand at the threshold of another world, the world of spirit. Such is the purely philosophical procedure, which normally goes from the less abstract to the more abstract, or from the sensible to the intelligible. In the *Summa Theologiae*, however, man is immediately introduced, not as a body among other bodies, but as a created being, composed of body and soul, which latter is directly produced by God and forms the principal object of inquiry. Here the order of the questions and the importance attached to each are, clearly, quite different. De Anima

Consequently, Thomistic psychology admits of two different yet authentic presentations. One may follow the plan and view- St Thomas

point of the De Anima, or take the position adopted in the psychological portions of the theological works. The latter course has the advantage of giving a more orderly account of St. Thomas' own views. But the De Anima also has its advantages. Among other things, it takes us to the very source of St. Thomas' doctrine. What is more—and this is of capital importance—it stays within the bounds of purely philosophical speculation, which, as Thomism rightfully teaches, must come to the spiritual by way of the material.

Therefore, without neglecting the rich psychological contributions of the Summa, we shall follow the step-by-step upward treatment observed in Aristotle's De Anima, going from the general to the particular, from the lowest degree of life to the highest. Thus, we shall begin with the study of the soul, first considering it in general as the principle of life, and then its faculties. Next we take up in order the three basic degrees of life that have always been attributed to man, namely, vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual life. Lastly, in the concluding portion, we come back to the particular problem of the human soul, a problem that naturally presents itself at the point where the soul's higher activities are discussed. Accordingly, the present work may be divided into the following main headings:

- Order of Procedure {
1. Life, the Soul, and Its Faculties
  2. Vegetative Life
  3. Sensitive Life
  4. Intellectual Life
  5. The Human Soul and Its Problems

### III. SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

What are the sources to be used in constructing a Thomistic psychology? First and foremost, obviously, are the works of Aristotle himself, for these supply not only the foundation but most of the superstructure as well.

1. *The Biopsychological Accomplishment of Aristotle*

a) *The biopsychological writings of Aristotle*.—This portion of the Aristotelian corpus includes a whole series of important works. As listed below, they are divided into three principal parts, a division that is generally accepted:

- i. The *De Anima* (in 3 books)
- ii. The *Parva Naturalia*, a collection of the following smaller writings:

*De Sensu et Sensato*

*De Memoria et Reminiscentia*

*De Somno et Vigilia* and *De Somniis*

*De Divinatione per Somnum*

*De Longitudine et Brevitate Vitae*

*De Vita et Morte*

*De Respiratione*

- iii. A group of books dealing specifically with natural science in the ancient sense of animal study:

*Historia Animalium*

*De Partibus Animalium*

*De Motu Animalium*

*De Incessu Animalium*

*De Generatione Animalium*

Besides the aforesaid, a work called *De Plantis* has been attributed to Aristotle, but it is hardly genuine. By contrast, all the other works mentioned appear to be authentic.

b) *The place of psychology in the philosophy of Aristotle*.—There is no doubt that Aristotle regarded the study of living beings and their principle, the soul, as a part of the philosophy of nature. But it is also true that at the end of his inquiry into the soul he has found an activity that is independent of the body. This activity, which is thought, opens new avenues of speculation and even prompts him to raise anew, but without deciding it, the very question as to whether this science



belongs to natural philosophy. Be that as it may, his biopsychological writings, such as we have them, savor strongly of what has come to be known as natural and biological science.

As for the place where psychology belongs within the philosophy of nature as a whole, we can say that the plan followed by Aristotle in natural philosophy is to go from the more universal to the more particular. Thus, he begins by considering motion and mobile being in general. Then he studies each kind in particular, with special emphasis on that movement we call life, and that mobile being which is the principle or source of vital movement, the living being. As set forth by the Stagirite, then, the subject of psychology is a particular kind of body among other bodies, and the science corresponding to this subject is but a particular section of the general study of nature.

c) *The formation and development of the psychology of Aristotle*.—A point of discussion among students of Aristotle is whether his psychological, or more correctly perhaps, his biopsychological works were all written at a time when his thought had, so to speak, crystallized; or whether they are so many distinct contributions, representing different stages of development? Speaking for Aristotle's philosophy as a whole, the German scholar, W. Jaeger, believes it reveals a pattern of development, ranging from a sharply defined metaphysical and Platonic character in the beginning, to a more empirical form in the end, when Aristotle had disembarassed himself of the theory of ideas.<sup>1</sup> Granting such a gradual unfolding of Aristotle's thought in general, would it be true of his psychology in particular? This question is the subject of a more recent work by F. Nuyens, who traces what he considers to be such a progressive development.<sup>2</sup>

In his earlier writings, according to Nuyens, Aristotle ad-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, trans. by Richard Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. F. Nuyens, *Évolution de la psychologie d'Aristote* (Louvain: 1948).

hered to the Platonic view of the soul, considering it in sharp contrast, not to say opposition, to the body. The next period was one of transition, producing writings of lesser importance in which soul and body are brought closer together. The third and final period is represented by his great works, in which at last Aristotle had found his own cardinal doctrine, declaring the soul the form of the body. This doctrine, moreover, was to give course and direction to his whole psychology. If this diagnosis is correct, the central point around which Aristotle's own psychology gradually assumed definite and original form, was the matter of the soul's relation to the body. This problem, moreover, was still not completely disposed of in the final stage of development, for at the end of his inquiry Aristotle faces a dilemma. On the one hand the soul as *psyche* and substantial form, was joined to the body; but at the same time, as *nous* or principle of spiritual operations, it also transcended the body. On the whole, however, Aristotle's thought would appear to have undergone progressive development in the direction of ever-increasing embodiment of the soul.

On the basis of the foregoing remarks we shall assume, for our present purpose, that the principal psychological writings of the Stagirite, the *De Anima* in particular, stem from the period when, by general consensus, the growth of his thought had already reached its final and lasting stage. Consequently, we may regard them as a uniform source of information.

d) *The order of the biopsychological treatises of Aristotle.*—A further question is whether in writing his various psychological works Aristotle followed a certain order or over-all plan. If so, what was it?

Following St. Albert, St. Thomas puts the general study of the soul, the *De Anima*, at the beginning. This work, he believes, is to furnish the directive principles for the study of the other treatises, since in all living things the principle of activity is a

soul. Following the *De Anima* would be the other works, dealing with different kinds of living beings and their parts and functions.

Even though this sequence is not without logical ground, some of the other great commentators, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes, take a different view.<sup>3</sup> According to them the writings treating of the physical parts of animals should come first; next, the *De Anima*, which studies the substantial form of living beings; lastly, the other works, in which inquiry is made into the more particular characteristics and functions of living beings. This arrangement, which would seem to merit preference, has the advantage of giving bolder relief to the physical or bodily considerations that are so prominent in this psychology. In other words, the latter course not only avoids the extremely spiritualist or metaphysical procedure that still had its followers not so many generations back, but it is also more in harmony with present-day methods of psychology, in which the study of the organism plays a paramount role. Seen in this light, Aristotle's psychology appears very modern indeed.

## 2. The Psychology of St. Thomas

a) *The psychological writings of St. Thomas.*—With reference to psychology St. Thomas, as previously noted, may be considered either as a commentator of Aristotle or as a theologian making use of and rounding out a psychological doctrine in furtherance of theological problems. As for the commentaries, those on the *De Anima*, on *De Sensu et Sensato*, and *De Memoria et Remiscentia* are authentic; the others usually found in the complete editions of St. Thomas' works are apocryphal.<sup>4</sup> Among his theological writings there are three principal works

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. M. Festugière, "La place du *De Anima* dans le système aristotélicien d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Archives d'histoire littéraire et doctrinale du Moyen Age* (VI, 1931).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Angeli M. Pirotta's preface to his edition of St. Thomas' Commentary on *De Sensu et Sensato* (Turin: Marietti, 1928).



in which psychological questions are treated at length and in order: *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. II, chaps. 56–101; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qq. 75–89; and the *Quaestio Disputata de Anima*. In addition, there are countless smaller passages scattered throughout his works, especially in the *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, *De Potentia*, and *De Malo*.

b) *The sources*.—The sources for St. Thomas' psychological doctrine vary with any given question and must be ascertained in each particular case. The basic source, of course, is *Aristotle*, on whose principal writings not only in psychology but also in other fields St. Thomas, having long searched and made them his own, wrote commentaries rich in detail and sure of insight. But he also makes frequent use of the great commentaries of antiquity (those of *Alexander of Aphrodisias*, *Simplicius*, *Philoponus*, *Themistius*), together with those of the Jewish and Arabian commentators of medieval times. Nor should it be overlooked that the psychology of St. Thomas also owes much to various writings of Platonic inspiration, even if sometimes by way of mere reaction to them. St. Augustine, for example, must be regarded as one of his most constant teachers, seeing that his great genius had already raised and thoroughly sifted the problems of the soul as seen in the light of the Christian message.

c) *Modern commentaries and studies*.—As was to be expected, the great commentaries and writings of later Scholastics in regard to problems of the soul were inevitably based on the work of St. Thomas. Particularly noteworthy as most true to St. Thomas' doctrine are those of *Cajetan*, *Sylvester of Ferrara*, and *John of St. Thomas*, the latter being the only one who treated the whole subject in systematic fashion.<sup>5</sup> The manuals of many present-day Scholastics merely reproduce the work of John of St. Thomas.

As for modern interpreters of Aristotle, especially worth men-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, Pars IV; editio Reiser, III (Turin: Marietti, 1937).

tioning in the present instance are Rodier, who has made a French translation and commentary of the *De Anima*; the English Aristotelian Scholar, W. D. Ross, under whose editorship the works of Aristotle have been translated into English, and who himself has written a study of Aristotle's philosophy as well as commentaries on the *Metaphysics* and the *Physics*; and F. Nuyens, whose more recent inquiry into the development of Aristotle's psychology has already been mentioned.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Also of particular interest to English-speaking readers is the latterly published English translation of Aristotle's *De Anima* in the version of William of Moerbeke together with a translation of the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas; trans. by Kenelm Foster, O.P., and Silvester Humphries, O.P., and appearing in the "Rare Masterpieces of Philosophy and Science Series" under the editorship of Dr. W. Stark (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1951).—[Tr.]



## + CHAPTER 2

# Life, the Soul, and Its Faculties

### I. LIFE AND THE DEGREES OF LIFE

#### 1. *Distinctive Characteristics of a Living Thing*

† ALL men have some knowledge regarding the nature of a living thing and its difference from what is nonliving. This knowledge is common property. What, then, lies at the bottom of these spontaneous notions of the average man?

In general the real nature of things does not dwell at the surface, to be seen at a glance. In practice, therefore, the philosopher as well as the common man must judge of their nature by their activities. Accordingly, the notion of life has to be gathered and put together by observing how living things behave, and comparing their behavior with that of nonliving things. This is what Aristotle did, remarking that some natural

bodies have life, others not; and by life is meant self-nutrition, growth, and self-decay.<sup>1</sup>

In his Commentary St. Thomas notes that Aristotle did not propose this observation as a formal definition of life, but merely as an illustration of certain activities that are typical of it. St. Thomas adds that other activities might have been included, at least for the higher forms of life associated with sense and intellect. Thus, not only self-nutrition, growth, and decay, but also the power to sense and to think, and the power to move themselves locally and to procreate are so many operations all men attribute to living things and, conversely, deny of the non-living.

There is another characteristic that marks off the living being. Unlike what is purely material, a living thing, we say, is an organized being, meaning that it is composed of heterogeneous parts with an orderly arrangement among themselves. A vegetable, for example, has roots, stem or stalk, and leaves and branches. The whole diversified structure gives rise to a harmonious ensemble of functions, operating for the perfection of the whole being. On the other hand, the parts of a mere mineral are, all of them, homogeneous, at least so far as we can judge from our scale of observation. Actually, however, this second characteristic of life reduces to those of the first group, which are more fundamental.

## 2. *The Formal Definition of Life*

Needless to say, we want to know more precisely what it is that separates living things from the nonliving. Even a superficial inspection reveals, among other things, that the former are endowed with a certain interiority or spontaneity not found anywhere else. For example, it is by its own initiative or power that the animal moves from place to place, and nourishes, and reproduces itself, whereas in the motion, say, of a stone the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *De Anima*, II, 1, 412 a 13.

whole impetus, so far as we can see, comes from the outside. This fact leads us to affirm that the power to move itself by itself is distinctive of the living being, since the nonliving is such as to move only in being moved by another. Of course, as used here, the terms "movement" and "being moved" are taken in their widest acceptance, which includes every kind of change as well as local movement. Such, in general, is the definition of life that has persisted in Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophy. On this point St. Thomas remarks:

Life is essentially that by which a thing is able to move itself, taking the word "movement" in a wide sense, so that even the operation of the intellect can be called "movement." For, those things that can be moved only by an exterior principle are said to be without life.<sup>2</sup>

A living being, then, is one that can move itself. But what, exactly, does this statement mean? For one thing, it suggests the spontaneity, the inner thrust and impulse, that seems to characterize vital activity. A living being, in other words, has within itself the efficient principle of its activity. This is an accurate observation, but we must not take it to mean more than it does. To say that things having life can move themselves does not imply that the movement of nonliving things in no way proceeds from within, or conversely, that the activity of the living does not depend on exterior conditions. By reason of its form, even a nonliving being may be considered as a kind of principle of activity, but all this means is that the nonliving can transmit, mechanically as it were, the impulse or determination it receives. A living being, however, responds in an original and assimilative manner to the exterior surroundings on which it variously depends; by its own initiative and power it transforms what it receives from without, doing so in a manner that becomes increasingly more individual and personal according to the scale of its activities. At the physiological level this re-

<sup>2</sup> *In II De Anima*, lect. 1, no. 219; cf. also *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 18, a. 1.

sponse proper to living things is known as "irritability." At this level, therefore, irritability is said to be the characteristic of life.

Even in this primitive scale, however, the words "to move oneself" have another, and deeper, significance. What they mean is that the living being is the object and term of its own activity, that in some respects living things are ends unto themselves. In contrast, the activities of material bodies appear to have no other purpose than to act upon and transform things exterior to themselves. Living beings, on the other hand, act for their own advantage, seeking both to sustain their own being and to acquire its full development. In some manner and measure their activity remains within them, so that it may be designated as *immanent*. This quality of immanence, moreover, admits of varying degrees, from the comparatively crude interiority of vegetative life to its highest form in the absolutely perfect possession of self, found in God.

### 3. *The Degrees of Immanence in Vital Activity*

Common experience has always agreed—and science has found no conclusive evidence to the contrary—that there are three basic kinds of living beings in nature, namely, vegetables, animals, and humans. Following this general acknowledgement, philosophy recognizes a threefold degree of life: vegetative life in plants, sensitive life in animals, and intellectual life in man, noting, moreover, that the lower degrees of this hierarchy are contained in the higher.

St. Thomas, it is obvious, took special delight in the study of this hierarchy of the degrees of life, leaving us more than one account of it.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes he bases the gradation on the degree of immateriality relating to a substantial form and its

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Contra Gentiles*, IV, 11; *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 18, a. 3; q. 78, a. 1; *Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 13; *De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 11; *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 1; *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, a. 2.



activities; but generally he prefers to determine the kinds of life according to the degree of immanence found in different operations of life. In the fundamental text on this matter,<sup>4</sup> St. Thomas begins with the principle that the more a being is capable of acting by itself, the higher it is in the scale of life. With this principle as a guide he establishes his classification according to the greater or lesser degree of interiority evidenced by the several factors underlying the activity of a living being, these factors being either a principal or instrumental form and the end. Accordingly, he distinguishes three general kinds of living beings in nature:

1) Those beings (plants) in which nature implants both the form and the end of their movement, so that they act as mere instruments of execution in regard to the movement.

2) Those beings (animals) which, while not determining their own end, nevertheless acquire through themselves the forms governing their activities, these forms being the sensible representations that cause them to move themselves.

3) Lastly, those beings (humans) which, being endowed with intellect, are capable both of determining their end and acquiring the form that is the principle of their operations.

The doctrine here summarized is set forth at greater length in the following passage from the *Summa* (Ia, 18, 3), a passage which we have already referred to as the basic text on the matter:

Since a thing is said to live in so far as it operates of itself and not as moved by another, the more perfectly this power is found in anything, the more perfect is the life of that thing. In things that move and are moved a threefold order is found. In the first place the end moves the agent: and the principal agent is that which acts through its form, and sometimes it does so through some instrument that acts by virtue not of its own form, but of the principal agent, and does no more than execute the action.

<sup>4</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 18, a. 3.

Accordingly there are things that move themselves, not in respect of any form or end naturally inherent in them, but only in respect of the executing of the movement; the form by which they act, and the end of the action being alike determined for them by their nature. Of this kind are plants, which move themselves according to their inherent nature, with regard only to executing the movements of growth and decay.

Other things have self-movement in a higher degree, that is, not only with regard to executing the movement, but even as regards the form, the principle of movement, which form they acquire of themselves. Of this kind are animals, in which the principle of movement is not a naturally implanted form; but one received through sense. Hence the more perfect is their sense, the more perfect is their power of self-movement. . . . Yet although animals sense the form that is the principle of their movement, nevertheless they cannot of themselves propose to themselves the end of their operations, or movements; for this has been implanted in them by nature; and by natural instinct they are moved to any action through the form apprehended by sense.

Hence such animals as move themselves in respect to an end they themselves propose are superior to these. This can only be done by reason and intellect, whose province it is to know the proportion between the end and the means to that end, and duly coordinate them.

In the last instance there is the further distinction of lower intellects, such as that of man, and the divine intellect. The former are not completely self-determining, being determined at least by the first principles of the mind; whereas the divine intellect, being always in act, is perfectly autonomous and therefore attains the highest possible degree of vital immanence.

In the *Contra Gentiles* St. Thomas takes up the same subject, this time in connection with the doctrine of the Trinitarian processions.<sup>5</sup> His starting point here is this: The higher a nature in the scale of being, the more interior will be whatever originates

<sup>5</sup> *Contra Gentiles*, IV, 11.

from it. Thus, at the lowest scale of things we find material bodies, from which nothing can issue forth except through the influence of another. In this way fire begets fire, by producing an alteration in another body.

Above material bodies are plants, in which interior emanation of a sort takes place, since it is within the plant that the sap, according to the ancients, is converted into seed. But it is obvious that here there is not perfect interiority, because the emanation in question, the seed, eventually becomes a being entirely separate from the parent plant. Besides, it should be clearly noted that the original principle itself of this emanation comes from without, namely, the nourishment which the plant through its roots receives from the earth.

Superior to plants are animals, in which is found a higher degree of life, having its principle in the sensitive soul. On this level the emanation results in a term that is truly immanent, for the sensory image or form impressed on the senses, proceeds to the imagination from which it is conveyed to and stored in the memory. However, principle and term of the emanation are still separate and distinct, for the sensory powers cannot reflect on themselves.

It is only with intellect, a reflective power, that we encounter the highest degree of life. Yet even here there are gradations, since the interiority marking the activity of this faculty may be realized more or less perfectly, depending on the intellect in question. At the lowest level is the intellect of man, since man depends on something outside himself for the starting point of his intellectual activity. The intellect of the angel is higher, for the angel knows himself directly through himself, yet by an act of knowledge that is distinct from his substance. It is only in the utterly perfect unity and immanence of God that vital activity reaches its absolute perfection.\*

In short, vital activity on the one hand and immanence or

\* Cf. Text I, "The Degrees of Immanence in Vital Activity," p. 238.



interiorness on the other, are correlative terms whose progressively higher manifestation corresponds to the hierarchy of perfection in living beings. Furthermore, the notion of life, being realized in a manner that is proportional to the various degrees of this hierarchy, is essentially an analogical notion. Consequently, the life of a plant, of an animal, of man, and an angel or pure spirit, are not specifically the same; and in man, moreover, in whom several degrees of life exist together, there is only an analogical proportion between the activity of one degree and another. These points should be made clear at the outset, if only to caution against a univocal interpretation of the notions in question.

## II. THE ARISTOTELIAN DEFINITION OF THE SOUL

### 1. *The Problem of the Soul*

a) *Defining the problem.*—The problem of the soul is one with the problem of life. Earliest man himself appears to have been occupied with it; indeed, it could hardly have failed to draw his attention. Man has always been struck by the fact that certain beings in nature distinguish themselves from others by an organization that is remarkably unified and by a behavior that is original and utterly unlike that of other beings. It was but natural to wonder whether these unique qualities displayed by such beings should be attributed to their having an intrinsic, invisible principle, a soul, whose appearance is simultaneous with the very moment of their begetting and whose disappearance coincides with the moment of their death. Closely connected with the problem of the soul, moreover, have always been religious and moral questions, with the result that belief in the soul has taken many and extremely varied forms. More than one scholar has attempted to retrace the history of this



belief in one form or another.<sup>7</sup> Our present concern, however, lies along different lines.

To begin with, let us make it clear what we mean by soul. In general, the soul is seen as a principle of life. In saying this, we are using the word "soul" in its widest sense, according to which it means nothing more than the first and innermost principle of life. When searching for first and ultimate principles, moreover, one can focus one's attention on more immediately evident elements relating to the inquiry. For example, in studying the nature of life, one can concentrate on various organs of a living being, such as the heart, or on a particular faculty, such as the intellect. But these would not be ultimate considerations. It is only in taking up the study of the soul itself that we come to grips, as it were, with the ultimate, intrinsic explanation of the dynamic force and energy that characterize living things. As St. Thomas remarks: "To seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life in those things which live."<sup>8</sup> To forestall every ambiguity, it should further be noted that in the present chapter we are speaking of the soul in general, as common to all living things in nature, to vegetables and animals as well as to man. The questions to be discussed, therefore, are those that concern the soul in general. Those that pertain specifically to the human soul as an immaterial form and the principle of that higher life which is in man, will be dealt with later.

<sup>7</sup> Erwin Rohde's classic work, *Psyche: the cult of souls and belief in immortality among the Greeks*, is such a study with respect to Greek culture; trans. from the 8th German edition by W. B. Willis (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925. London: Paul Trench, Truber and Co., 1925) and appearing in the International Library of Psychology, Philosophy, and Scientific Method.

For the bibliographical details of the English translation of Rohde's study I am indebted to Virginia Clark, reference assistant to The University of Chicago Library.—[Tr.]

<sup>8</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 75, a. 1.

b) *The study of the soul in Aristotle and St. Thomas.*—As we have previously said, Aristotle, on the basis of his own study and reflection, gradually abandoned his earlier view of the soul, which was much like the ultra-spiritualist doctrine of Plato, and in its place adopted what may be called an animist interpretation, making the soul the form of living beings. This is the view that emerged as the distinctive feature of his own thought on the nature of living things. It would be most interesting to review in detail the course of this intellectual evolution in Aristotle, revealing as it does the profound study and insight with which he pursued the subject. But here again we can only refer the reader to the work of specialists in the field.<sup>9</sup> For our purpose we shall simply take his doctrine as it was in its state of full development, which is to say, as expounded in the *De Anima*.

Clearly, the essential core of this work is the definition of the soul. As he had done in Book A of the *Metaphysics*, when he was investigating the problem of causes, so in the *De Anima* Aristotle begins by setting forth and submitting to critical examination the theories of the soul held by others before him (Bk. II, chaps. 1–2). In the historical part of his exposition the Stagirite, like his predecessors, first considers the soul as principle of movement, and then as principle of sensation. Most of the arguments making up the discussion are directed against various materialist interpretations of life and its manifestations, but the ultra-spiritualist dualism of Plato also comes in for criticism.

In the Commentary on the *De Anima* St. Thomas follows the text before him very closely. In some of his other writings,

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. Nuyens, *Évolution de la psychologie d'Aristote* (Louvain: 1948).

Perhaps for most English readers a more convenient, though less complete, reference in point is W. Jaeger's earlier-mentioned work, *Aristotle*, pp. 39–53, 331–341. Needless to say, not all scholars are in full agreement with Jaeger's reconstruction of the development of Aristotle's doctrine as a whole, or of his psychological doctrine in particular.—[Tr.]

however, he treats this whole question of the soul in a more personal manner.<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact, when St. Thomas is engaged in a theological work, the framework for the discussion of the soul is quite different, though even here his teaching in the matter, apart from the question of immortality, is basically the same as that of his master. In a theological setting the immortality of the soul and its creation by God are simply taken as revealed data, and the principal point at issue is the possibility and the manner of its union with a body. In St. Thomas, moreover, the discussion as a whole takes a more complex turn by the opinions of ancient and Arabian commentators being brought in, notably those of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes.

As we shall see presently, in their treatment of the soul both Aristotle and his disciple address themselves primarily to two general streams of thought, one opposed to the other, namely, materialist mechanism and absolute dualism. Compelled to reject both as unsound, master and disciple brought forth their own solution in terms of hylomorphism, or more precisely, animism, declaring the soul the form of the body. Our next step, therefore, is to give a brief account of the criticism directed against mechanism on the one hand and Plato's dualism on the other.

## 2. *The Criticism of Mechanism*

The materialist or mechanist view of the soul is not the exclusive hallmark of contemporary thought. In one form or another Aristotle himself, not to say his earlier as well as later followers, was confronted with this doctrine. This being so, one may legitimately ask what they thought about it.

a) For the answer to this question we may go to the first part of the *Summa*, question 75, where the matter is treated in terms

<sup>10</sup> Cf. especially *Contra Gentiles*, II, 56-57; *Summa theol.*, Ia, qq. 75-76; *Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 1.



that are very clear and to the point. The first article asks whether the soul is a body. The answer is no, because whatever it is that distinguishes a living from a nonliving body, it cannot be another body; else, all bodies would have to be deemed alive. As for the human soul in particular (art. 2), it must further be stated that the higher operation of this soul, the act of intellectual knowledge, cannot have its principle in a body or bodily organ. In other words, if the human soul were corporeal, possessing a determined, corporeal nature, the intellect would be corporeal, and it could not know other things of similar nature. Were this the case, it would not be true to say that the intellectual faculty is in potency to all intelligible objects.

Granted that the soul is not a body pure and simple, in the sense of a stark materiality, is it perhaps some sort of structural blend or arrangement, resulting from the various elements being reduced to a composite? St. Thomas knew this theory in two forms closely alike, one, attributed to Galen, viewing the soul as a "complexion," and the other, traceable to Empedocles, as a "harmony."<sup>11</sup> The gist of this theory is that living bodies as well as others are actually composed of nothing more than material elements; but in the former, it is said, there exists a certain proportional arrangement which, though not a true formal principle, being an effect rather than a principle, is nevertheless supposed to account for the organization and activity of the whole. St. Thomas makes it clear, however, that this concession will not save the situation. Neither mere corporeal structuring or texture ("complexion"), nor a harmony, can perform the function of a principle of movement, nor can it serve as an explanation why we sometimes act contrarily to the body's own inclinations. Also, it cannot account for such operations as knowledge, which plainly surpass the active and passive capacities inherent in material elements. All of which means that the principle of life has to be a reality of quite another cast.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Contra Gentiles*, II, 63-64.

b) The foregoing arguments are of a general nature. For the sake of illustration, therefore, let us see how St. Thomas deals with a specific point regarding the theory of Empedocles, namely, the phenomenon of augmentation or growth in living things.<sup>12</sup> According to the theory this effect is sufficiently accounted for by the natural motion of light and heavy elements, without recourse to a soul. The downward thrust of the roots is due solely to the natural downward movement of the element of earth, which is heavy, while the upward growth, it is claimed, comes from the natural upward movement of the element of fire, which is light. But, says St. Thomas, this is an impossible explanation, and for several reasons. First, up and down, he believes, are not to be taken in the same sense for the world as a whole and for individual living beings (the upper part of a plant, for instance, being its roots, the lower parts its foliage). Furthermore, the interaction of such contrary forces would make for disrupting the living being, unless it were held together by the greater unifying power of the soul. And as for the assertion that fire alone is the active cause of growth as well as nutrition, St. Thomas answers, yes, fire is indeed a cause in this process, but simply as an instrument of a principal cause, which is none other than the soul. Purely physical energies would tend to produce indefinite increase, whereas growth that is limited and clearly defined presupposes a regulating principle, or measure, that is above and beyond the purely physical order.

So much for St. Thomas' handling of the materialist and mechanist interpretation of the phenomenon of growth. Doubtless, his arguments, in part at least, appeal to certain physical theories now outmoded. For all that, however, the substance of his proofs is not without real value or interest for us. Among other things, his procedure makes it clear that the phenomenon in question is a living process displaying original and distinctive qualities. The explanation proposed by the materialist is refuted

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *In II De Anima*, lect. 8.



by the characteristic behavior of vital transformations being brought into careful and accurate contrast with mere physical operations. Beyond this, a serious attempt is made to give an authentic account of vital activities by putting forward the existence of a governing principle that is not of the purely material order. On the whole, even though scientific facts are now better controlled and more accurately observed, a demonstration of this kind, carefully applied, could still have real value.

c) With reference to what we have just said, it is worth noting that in our day biological mechanism has again become the target of criticism, this time from some recognized scientists, whose views are commonly known as "vitalism." This label, it must be confessed, includes a rather wide assortment of theories that are not without differences of their own. Nevertheless, all agree in seeking to explain vital phenomena by some force or power that goes beyond the mere modifications of matter, the inference being, quite correctly, that purely material alterations are not enough to account for the unique character of such phenomena. Among this school of thought is a group called "neo-vitalists," which includes such acknowledged scientists as Driesch, Rémy Collin, and Cuénot. These, among others, frankly assert the need of a vital principle in terms that are strikingly reminiscent of the Aristotelian *entelechy*.

### 3. *The Criticism of Platonic Dualism*

Another view confronting Aristotle was Plato's extreme dualism, which regarded body and soul each as a separate and complete substance. This view, which for a time Aristotle himself endorsed, was almost the exact opposite of the mechanist interpretation of life and its manifestations. If, as we have seen, it is wrong to identify the soul with the corporeal elements or with their over-all behavior, is it correct to say that the soul is a spiritual entity altogether separate from the body, on which it acts from the outside, as it were, like an extrinsic mover? St. Thomas formulates this position as follows:

Plato and his school held that the intellectual soul is not united to the body as form to matter, but only as mover to movable, for he said that the soul is in the body as a sailor in a boat. In this way the union of soul and body would only be by virtual contact (*per contactum virtutis*).<sup>13</sup>

Among the many arguments that make up the Aristotelian criticism and repudiation of this ultra-dualist interpretation of man, there are two that would seem to have been decisive.

First, if body and soul are each a substantial and independent unity, it is difficult to see how their association could result in a being that is truly one. As St. Thomas observes: "It follows then that a man is not one simply, and neither consequently a being simply, but accidentally."<sup>14</sup> Nor do you get around this dilemma by saying that the soul alone is man, the body being but an instrument that it uses. In this case man, whose whole nature would be of the spiritual order, would in no way belong to the world of physical realities, a pretension that is obviously contradicted by experience. In short, there can be no excluding the bodily side of man from the definition of man.

Secondly, if the Platonic solution is correct, how can one speak of human experiences having their source in both principles of man, that is, in body as well as soul? Yet, there are responses of this kind, as, for instance, fear, anger, and other sensations. These are not experienced in the soul alone, but involve certain definite alterations of the body as well. They point to the necessity of a true unity of being between body and soul. Furthermore, the Platonic difficulty regarding human experiences that are common to body and soul, is not explained away by saying that the soul is the active principle of such movements, which are passively received in the body. This reasoning holds for completely spiritual beings, such as angels. These can act on bodies by way of contact, but in this case the

<sup>13</sup> *Contra Gentiles*, II, 57.

<sup>14</sup> "Relinquitur igitur quod homo non sit unum simpliciter, et per consequens nec ens simpliciter, sed ens per accidens" (*loc. cit.*).

contact is merely in the order of power or action, and does not result in mover and moved becoming one in being. "Things united by contact of this kind," remarks St. Thomas, "are not one simply. For they are one in action and passion, which is not to be one simply."<sup>15</sup> "To act" and "to be acted on" are two distinct predicaments of accidental being; consequently, in the realm of action as in that of being, the Platonic view labors under the difficulty of its excessive dualism between the spiritual and the bodily principle of man.

To sum up, the living being bears abundant witness to possessing a real unity, notwithstanding the presence of two distinct principles, body and soul, which its behavior impels us to acknowledge. For this reason the bond between soul and body must be something more than an outer union, such as prevails between an extrinsic mover and the thing moved. These considerations led Aristotle to find and propound his own solution, which is as noteworthy as it is original.

#### 4. *The Animist (Hylomorphic) Solution of Aristotle*

a) Aristotle's decisive argument leading to the definition of the soul is found in the first chapter of Book II of *De Anima*. His procedure consists in reviewing, one after the other, the principal categories of being. Taking as his starting point the evident fact that a living being of nature belongs to the category of corporeal being, he reasons as follows.

Substance, the first category, is either spiritual or corporeal. Corporeal substance, which is more evident to us, may be artificial or natural. Among natural corporeal substances, some have life, others not. It is the definition of living corporeal substances that we are seeking. But, in every corporeal substance, whether it is living or nonliving, three things may be considered: matter, form, and the composite. The soul of a living substance cannot be its matter, that is to say, the subject, since

<sup>15</sup> *Contra Gentiles*, II, 56.



<sup>The Soul</sup> life is precisely a difference specifying the subject. Nor can it be the composite, which is the living body in its totality. Since the soul is neither matter nor composite, it can be only that which specifies and determines, in other words, form. St. Thomas sums up the Aristotelian argument in the following manner:

Since, then, substance may be taken in three ways, namely, as composite, matter, and form, and since the soul is neither the composite, which is the body having life, nor matter, which is the body as the subject of life, we are compelled by the logic of division to say that the soul is substance in the manner of form, being the form of a particular kind of body, namely, of a physical body having life in potency.<sup>16</sup>

In this same context St. Thomas goes on to explain why the soul is specifically the form of a body "having life in potency." The reason is that the body does not have life in act until it is informed by the soul. Next he shows that the act in question is a "first act," which means an essential form, and not merely an operative or second act. Lastly, he develops the point that the body of which the soul is the form, is a "physical, organic body." Because the soul has manifold operations for which it needs various organs as instruments, the body it informs must already have a certain organization. Putting all these elements together, we arrive at the classic definition of the soul as "the first act (or form) of a physical (natural) organic body having life in potency":

*actus primus corporis physici organici vitam in potentia habentis.*<sup>17</sup>

b) In the second chapter of the same Book II, Aristotle proposes another definition of the soul, one that is based on

<sup>16</sup> In II De Anima, lect. 1, no. 221.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Text II, "The Human Soul Is Both a Form and a Substantial Individual," p. 241.



its operations. Assuming that the soul is the first principle of life, and by life is meant self-nutrition, growth, and decay, he concludes that the soul may be defined as the principle of these activities and, in the case of man, of the higher activity of thought. So, with St. Thomas we can formulate a second, and equally classic, definition, saying that the soul is "the first principle by which we live, sense, move, and understand":

*anima est primum quo et vivimus et sentimus et movemur et intelligimus.*<sup>18</sup>

*operations*

It will readily be seen that this definition pares down to the other, since both rest on the more general doctrine of substance. In a composite substance the first principle of all operations is the form. In other words, the form is not only the principle by which such a substance exists, "quo est," but also by which it acts, "quo operatur."

c) In brief, then, Aristotle defines the soul as the form of the body. Perhaps, by way of terminating the point, we may be permitted a word of evaluation regarding this celebrated definition. For one thing, his argument as set forth in the passages here summarized, evinces a logical structure that is altogether flawless and unassailable. But it may also, and for that very reason, seem to be somewhat abstract and remote, lacking both life and substance. Beyond that, Aristotle assumes the validity of his general theory on the nature of composite substances. If, however, we grant his doctrine of substance, everything falls into place.

Still, there is no denying that in its skeletal form, such as it appears in the first chapter of Book II, his argument, though marked, as we have said, by an inner coherence that is beyond attack, does not of itself adequately reveal the vast labor of thought actually accomplished by the Stagirite. To consider his definition as something apart, without ancestry, as it were,

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *In II De Anima*, lect. 2, no. 273.

would be to overlook the long and careful critical analysis that makes up the entire first book, which is a major achievement in itself, representing the speculations in point of many generations of thinkers, from Empedocles to Democritus on the one hand, and from Anaxagoras to the author of the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus* on the other. So much has gone before—Aristotle, the founder of the Lyceum, thoroughly assimilating and re-living it all in his own mind during those long years of study and reflection that went into the full development of his own doctrine. If, as Aristotle was convinced, the materialism of the ancients was unable to explain the distinctive characteristics that living things display both in their structure and activity, and if, as he was equally convinced, Platonic dualism sundered the unity of these beings to the point of no repair, clearly, then, what was needed was to find a new and more comprehensive interpretation, one that would account for all the facts at hand. Accordingly, Aristotle has recourse to the doctrine of hylo-morphism, declaring the soul to be neither more nor less than the form of the body. With that, the dilemma between materialism and dualism collapses.

### 5. *Consequences and Corollaries*

a) *The unity of the living being.*—It was precisely his being convinced of the unity in a living thing that led Aristotle to his definition of the soul. Doubtless, a living thing is a complex entity; nevertheless, it is substantially one or unified. Moreover, the union of its substantial principles is immediate; so, there is no point in trying to explain what it is that constitutes their bond of unity, their so-called “vinculum substantiale.”

Hand in hand with the unity of a living being goes the doctrine of the unicity of the soul, which means that in each such being there is but one soul. As for the special case of man, if here we speak of a vegetative soul and a sensitive soul together with the spiritual soul, this is largely just that, namely, a manner

of speaking. Only the spiritual soul is an independent and subsistent entity, with the power to perform the functions of the other two. On this point St. Thomas firmly stood his ground against all those of his contemporaries who held for a plurality, whether of souls or substantial forms.

b) *The divisibility of the soul.*—The unity of the soul imposes its undividedness and, it would seem, its presence as a whole in every part of the body. But here a difficulty arises. Certain vital activities, sight for example, appear to be linked to special organs. Does not this require a specification of the vital principle in regard to these organs? St. Thomas replies that it does, but only as a potential whole is specified in being a principle of diverse activities, yet remaining essentially one. Consequently, the basic indivisibility of the soul is not compromised.

On this matter of indivisibility the ancients experienced some perplexity because of certain phenomena observed in some living beings, such as plants and lower animals. As is well known, these can be cut or otherwise divided into separate parts that will live. Does this mean that the souls in question, which are of a less perfect kind, have been divided? Or does it mean that new souls have been educed as if by generation? No definite answer can be given one way or another. What is important is to maintain the oneness of the soul in one living being.

c) *The corruptibility of the soul.*—Since it is the form of a composite substance, the soul follows the general course of such substances. Like every substantial form, it is “educed” at the moment of generation from the potency of matter; and when bodily conditions are so altered as no longer to meet the requirements of the soul, it reverts to the state of potentiality in matter from which it had been educed. The human soul, however, is directly created by God to be united to a body, and survives the destruction of the body. This is a question that has to be considered separately. From the standpoint of general



biological theory the human soul must be regarded as an exception.

d) *How the soul moves the body.*—By explaining the living substance in terms of hylomorphism, we avoid the untenable position of materialism without undermining the unity of the living being, which is the error of Platonic dualism. But in taking this view, how can we still attribute to the soul the activity of moving the body?

The answer, in the first place, is that the soul's moving the body is not, strictly speaking, an efficient motion, that is, a movement in the order of efficient causality, because an exercise of efficient causality results jointly from body and soul, which is to say, from the living being as a whole in its composite reality. Hence, if in such a movement the soul is considered separately, it can only be as a formal principle, a principle by which or "quo." The fact is that the form exercises the role of end in regard to the activity of composite bodies, and therefore it is basically as a final cause that the soul exercises its influence on the operations of a living being. In man, accordingly, the lower activity of the sensitive and vegetative order, as well as his intellectual activity, is designed to serve the spiritual soul.

POWER  
TO  
MOVE

### III. THE POTENCIES OF THE SOUL

Aristotle introduces the question of the potencies of the soul in the following manner.<sup>19</sup> The soul, he says, is defined as the principle of many diverse activities, such as to sense, to desire, to think, and to move from place to place. Does a living being perform each of these activities through the soul in its entirety, or should we say that they correspond to different parts in the soul? Leaving aside the rather complicated answer presented in *De Anima*, we shall go directly to the *Summa* of St. Thomas, which contains a good summary of the whole matter.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *De Anima*, II, 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, qq. 77–78.



1. *The Essence of the Soul Cannot Be Its Potencies*

The question, as we have said, is whether one has to admit the existence of certain principles of operation that are distinct from the essence of the soul. St. Thomas has a whole series of arguments to prove that such distinct principles must be acknowledged.<sup>21</sup>

a) In any given order of being, act and potency must belong to the same highest genus within that order. But it is clear that the operations of the soul do not belong to the genus of substance; therefore the corresponding potencies cannot belong to this genus. It follows that they are accidents; and if accidents, they are really distinct from the essence of the soul.

b) From the standpoint of its essence the soul is in act. If, then, it were the immediate principle of operation, one should have to say that it is continuously performing its operations. But experience does not bear out such a statement. Hence, the soul is not the immediate principle of operation. *prox - prin*

c) Being diverse, the activities of the soul cannot be traced to a single principle, yet the soul obviously is a single principle. Consequently, there must be a plurality of potencies, distinct from the soul, to account for the diversity of activities performed.

d) Some potencies are the acts of definitely determined bodily organs, but others are not. Manifestly, the essence of the soul, being one, cannot be in this twofold situation at the same time. So, there are distinct potencies for such distinct modes of operation. *2nd 12*

e) Some potencies act upon others; for example, reason acts upon the sense appetite, both in its concupiscible and irascible form. This is clearly impossible if one does not admit, in addition to the essence of the soul, a plurality of potencies.

These are some of the arguments to prove that the potencies

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 77, a. 1; *Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 12.

are distinct from the essence of the soul. Apropos of these arguments, the following points should be kept in mind:

First, the distinction in question between the soul and its faculties is, plainly, nothing less than a real one. *different than*

Second, the faculties are to be understood as belonging to the genus "quality," in the second of the four species of quality. *check*

Third, the potencies that are linked to a bodily organ exist in the composite, that is, they inhere in the whole living being as in their subject; whereas the potencies that do not need a bodily organ for their operations, inhere directly in the soul.

Fourth, the potencies are said to "emanate" or issue from the essence of the soul; in some way, therefore, the soul may be considered as the cause of the potencies.

## 2. Concerning the Specification of the Potencies of the Soul

To the question whether the potencies of the soul are one or many, the obvious answer is that they are many. The multiplicity and diversity of operations displayed by living beings, especially by the higher types, cannot be explained without recourse to a plurality of potencies. How, then, are potencies distinguished from one another? St. Thomas, following the general principles of his metaphysics, teaches that they are distinguished or specified by their acts and their objects. *Potencies differentiated*

*potentiae animae distinguuntur per actus et objecta.*<sup>22</sup>

This principle stems from the very nature of a potency, since potency always implies order or relation to act. It follows, then, that potencies are diversified by the acts to which they are ordered. Acts, in turn, are specified by their objects, whether they be acts of passive potencies, which are moved by their objects, or acts of active potencies, which tend toward their

<sup>22</sup> Cf. In II De Anima, lect. 6; Summa theol., Ia, q. 77, a. 3; Quaest. Disp. de Anima, a. 13.

objects as toward an end. In every case, therefore, we must say that potencies are specified by their objects through the medium of their acts. Furthermore, it should be noted that the differences to be considered in the object are those to which the potencies are disposed or ordered by their proper nature. For example, the senses are diversified by different qualities in the sensible object considered precisely as sensible, such as color or sound, and not by any difference that is accidental to the sense quality. Thus, color is the object of sight, but something that is colored may also be a grammarian. Nevertheless, being a grammarian is accidental to its color considered as the formal object of sight.

This doctrine of the specification of potencies by their acts and objects is of the uttermost importance in St. Thomas. It guides the whole order and elaboration of his psychology, and forms the basis for the distinction of habits or virtues; thus, the whole development of his moral doctrine also depends on it. In particular, the treatise on the virtues in the *Secunda Secundae*, both so penetrating and thoroughgoing, is only a sustained application of this truth and principle.

### 3. *The Kinds of Soul and the Division of Potencies*

St. Thomas treats of the kinds of soul and the division of potencies in several places.<sup>23</sup> For our purpose it will be sufficient to outline the main points of the corresponding article in the *Summa*, where he gives an excellent summarization of the whole matter, setting forth in order the division of the soul into its kinds, the distinction of potencies, and the grades of life.<sup>24</sup>

a) *There are three kinds of soul.*—This enumeration rests on the very basic principle that not all vital activity is of the same kind. The fact is that vital operations differ as to greater or lesser dependence on the body and its activities, and these differences of operation betoken different kinds of life.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *In De Anima*, I, lect. 14; II, lect. 3 & 5; *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 78, a. 1; *Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 78, a. 1.



Accordingly, we may successively note: first, the rational soul, whose operation does not require the exercise of a bodily organ; next, the sensitive soul, which acts only through the medium of an organ, yet, strictly speaking, does not require any contribution from the properties of the material elements, since the elements serve only to dispose the organ; lastly, the vegetative soul, which, in addition to the activity of appropriate organs, implies the activity of material elements. In beings having a higher degree of life, the higher soul assumes the functions of the lower. Thus, in man the one rational soul is at once the principle of intellectual life, of sensitive life, and of vegetative life.

2 b) *There are five distinct genera of potencies.*—This classification is based, in part, on the scope of the object encompassed by a potency, for the higher the potency, the more inclusive is the object it considers.

From this point of view, then, we can divide objects into three large genera: first, the individual body united to the soul; second, the whole aggregate of sensible bodies; and third, all being universally. Corresponding to these three classes, and following the order of increasing perfection, there are the following distinct potencies: first, the vegetative potencies, which act only on the body in which they exist; secondly, relative to the two other genera of objects, two further genera of potencies, one in the order of knowledge, including sense and intellect, and the other in the order of appetition, including appetite and the locomotive power. In man, therefore, there are five distinct genera of potencies or faculties, which St. Thomas designates as follows:

vegetativum, sensitivum, intellectivum, appetitivum,  
motivum secundum locum.

These, moreover, may be subdivided into several species.

3 c) *There are four grades or modes of life.*—This last division is predicated on the hierarchy of perfection in living beings, the



perfection increasing with the number and variety of powers or faculties possessed by such beings. In the lowest order are those beings having only vegetative powers; these are the plants. Next are those that have both sensory and vegetative powers, but not self-locomotion; these are the lower animals. Still higher are those beings which, together with the aforesaid powers, have the capacity to move themselves locally, making it possible to move about in search of the things they need to live. But highest of all in nature are those beings endowed both with all the foregoing powers and with intellect; these are men. Appetite as such does not constitute a distinct grade of life, since it is found analogically in all being.

32-5-1

## † CHAPTER 3

# Vegetative Life

† BIRTH, self-nourishment, growth, generation, decay, these are so many processes that all men attribute to living things belonging to the lowest degree of life, which is called vegetative. As previously noted, the particular scope of this degree of life, its object so to speak, is simply the body that is informed by the soul, and nothing more:

*vegetativum . . . habet pro objecto ipsum corpus vivens per animam.*<sup>1</sup>

On this level we find three principal functions, differing specifically one from another: nutrition, augmentation or growth, and generation.

### 1. Nutrition

Of all vital phenomena, one of the most common and most regular in occurrence is nutrition. Living beings, it is clear, can-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 78, a. 1.

not continue to live without nourishing themselves. It is obvious to everyone that when an animal or plant stops feeding itself, it dies. The most immediate purpose of nutrition, then, is the preservation of the living being. Its necessity, apparently, derives from the organic nature of the living substance. Simple elements require no such activity; they either exist or not. Living beings, on the other hand, cannot maintain a proper balance and harmony of their various parts without the conserving activity of nutrition.

There are additional reasons for the existence of the nutritive function. To mention one, it is a fact of experience that the two other important activities of vegetative life, growth and generation, do not function in a living being unless it is fed. Thus, on the vegetative level of vital activity nutrition holds a place that is altogether basic.

b) *Definition of Nutrition.*—In the Commentary *De Anima* St. Thomas defines nutrition as follows: “Properly speaking, that is said to be nourished which receives something into itself for its preservation”:

*id proprie nutriri dicimus quod in seipso aliquid recipit ad sui conservationem.*<sup>2</sup>

Some clarifications of this definition may be noted. Nutrition, strictly speaking, consists neither in the absorption of food nor in the chemical change it undergoes in the process of digestion—a process Aristotle attributes to heat, characterizing it as a sort of cooking. Taken formally, nutrition denotes the conversion of food into the substance of that which is nourished; in other words, it consists in the living being assimilating and making its own another substance, with the result that it preserves its own being and is able to exercise its various activities. Such a process, it should be observed, cannot be reduced to a simple bringing together or juxtaposition of material parts; what it

<sup>2</sup> In *II De Anima*, lect. 9, no. 341.

presupposes is nothing less than a real transformation of the added substance.

c) *Nutrition and the various degrees of life*.—It may be of some advantage to compare nutrition proper with certain other activities that resemble it, both in the inorganic kingdom and in the realm of sense and intellect. As already said, the assimilation of food cannot be leveled down to a mere juxtaposition of material elements. But can it be likened to the physical or chemical generation of substances, as when, according to the ancients, fire becomes air, or in modern terms, elements combine to form compounds? Admittedly, in both cases, that is, in nutrition and the so-called generation of new substances, one substance is corrupted and transformed into another; but the conditions of these two processes are altogether different. In the generation of elements or compounds the principle and term of the transformation are different; fire, as the ancients thought, becomes air, whereas in nutrition the living being itself is both principle and term of the operation. Put philosophically, nutrition is an immanent activity—something not found in the mere generation of physical substances or compounds.

On the level of sensitive and intellectual life, further comparisons can be made. The process of knowledge, for example, bears some resemblance to bodily nutrition. Both sentient and intelligent beings do, in a way, nourish themselves in the realm of sense and intellect. Do we not, in fact, speak of spiritual nourishment, and of the hunger and thirst of truth? But again the differences are unmistakable. The so-called intentional union of knower and known is something utterly unique. Unlike food in nourishing, neither the knower nor the known is destroyed in the act of knowledge, in which they become one. If anything, it is the knower that becomes the known. Again, the capacity for bodily nourishment is strictly limited; but the range of the faculties of knowledge, especially of intellect, is virtually unlimited.

different



## 2. Growth

a) *Its purpose*.—Living things—and this, too, is a fact of experience—do not reach their full development by one stroke; their natural height in particular does not appear at once. Living beings grow and increase in height by degrees, until they reach a maximum point that seems to correspond to their complete development. Growth, therefore, which is in the category of quantitative increase, gives every indication of being a distinct process that requires a special faculty: the *vis augmentativa*.

b) *Definition of growth*.—Before defining growth we must be sure that the quantitative increase of living beings is, in fact, a sufficiently distinct operation to require a special faculty. Might it not be the mere natural result of other vegetative functions, say, of nutrition. To judge from appearances one might think so. Certainly, the growth of a living thing depends on its nourishment. Also, it would seem that the generative function, by which a new being is substantially engendered, should likewise bestow on this being its proper quantity. Despite these considerations, St. Thomas was firm in ascribing to growth a specific determination that could not be reduced to anything found in the other vegetative activities. Consequently, he maintains the existence of a distinct faculty to explain the phenomenon in question.

To speak precisely, the proper object of growth is the quantity of the living being. The faculty corresponding to this activity may be defined as the potency that enables a bodily being endowed with life to acquire its full stature or quantity as well as the full development of its powers:

*secunda autem perfectior operatio est augmentum quo aliquid proficit in maiorem perfectionem, et secundum quantitatem et secundum virtutem.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In II De Anima, lect. 9, no. 347.

Like every vital operation, the process of growth, having both its principle and termination within the living being, is an immanent activity.

c) *Growth and the various degrees of life.*—Inanimate things are capable of increase by juxtaposition; but, exception made perhaps of crystals and what modern science calls the ultra-viruses, they do not admit of genuine growth. Briefly, growth is an activity that is proper to living beings.

Above the vegetative level of life we find certain processes of development or increase that bear comparison with growth. But the comparisons also bring out the differences. The fact is that in the proper sense of the word quantitative growth does not occur beyond the corporeal world. In these other degrees of life there is only increase according to quality. In his treatise on habits St. Thomas has carefully analyzed the very special conditions of this type of increase.<sup>4</sup> Interesting as it might be, a discussion of this point would take us too far afield. The mere mention must suffice.

### 3. Generation

a) *Its purpose.*—In addition to self-nourishment and the attainment of their full development, living beings also have the power to generate, that is, to produce a being of their own specific kind. Aristotelian physics, it is true, spoke of generation with respect to the elements, such as fire and water. But it is clear that in living beings this operation is quite different, with properties all its own. The purpose of generation, also, is sufficiently obvious; moreover, one can consider it from two different aspects.

First, with respect to the individual and the whole of its activities, generation is a term and perfection: a term in reference to the other operations of vegetative life, nutrition and growth,

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia IIae, q. 52, "De causa habituum quantum ad augmentum."

which prepare the way for generation; a perfection inasmuch as to generate means to transmit one's being, to give oneself, thus realizing, in a manner, what is implied in the expression "act of the perfect," *actus perfecti*.

Secondly, from the standpoint of living beings collectively, generation is meant for a higher purpose, the continuation of the species. From this aspect, the perfect is the species, which endures, and the imperfect is the individual, which cannot live forever. As if to remedy this defect and survive by proxy, the individual imparts its nature to others that will continue its survival. These two purposes and points of view, it need hardly be said, are not exclusive one of the other, but complementary.

b) *Definition of generation.*—In the *Summa* St. Thomas defines the generation of living things as follows: "Generation . . . signifies the origin of a living being from a conjoined living principle . . . by way of similitude . . . in the same specific nature":

*generatio significat originem alicuius viventis a principio vivente coniuncto . . . secundum rationem similitudinis . . . in natura eiusdem speciei.*<sup>5</sup>

In this formulation, which has become classical, the words "origin of a living being" designate what is common to all generation. The words "from a conjoined living principle" tell the specific difference of generation in living beings. The last two qualifications, "by way of similitude" and "in the same specific nature," exclude from the definition such excrescences as the hair, as well as such things as the various secretions of the body. The process by which these things are produced is not a true generation because they do not arise from and result in a nature of the same specific kind.

c) *Generation in other levels of being.*—As remarked earlier, in the realm of beings below vegetative life we find a sort of

<sup>5</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 27, a. 2.



generation, namely, of one element or substance from another. But this process differs from generation proper, most of all because the activity involved is purely transitive.

Likewise on the plane of intellectual or spiritual being, generation in the strict sense does not occur, at least not among created spirits. The "verbum mentis" or concept, in which intellectual knowledge expresses itself, is not of the same nature as the principle from which it proceeds. There is, however, one exception in point; it is found in God, who, as faith teaches, truly begets the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. By contrast with human generation, the manner of this begetting is of such transcendent character as to exclude absolutely all imperfection on the part of God. How to go about elucidating this mystery is a matter for theology.\*

#### 4. Concluding Remarks on Vegetative Life

From what has been said it is clear that vegetative life as conceived in Aristotelian philosophy embraces a number of well-defined and co-ordinated activities involving a certain degree of immateriality and, correlatively, of immanence. Among the three principal functions distinguishable on this level, there exists a priority of order. Nutrition is the basic function, presupposed by the other two. Growth completes nutrition, and the further end of both is generation, in which vegetative life in one respect reaches its culmination.

Much could be said by way of appraisal and criticism of this doctrine of vegetative life, which reveals both keen insight and discrimination. Admittedly, in the light of the great progress made by the various sciences dealing with life, many of its details would need to be reworked. But there is no doubt that the basic insights on which it rests, retain their essential truth and value.

\* Cf. *Summa theol.*, loc. cit.



## † CHAPTER 4

# *Sensitive Life*

† OVER and above beings endowed with mere vegetative life, we find beings in nature that are also provided with sensitive activity. We have already seen that the principle of this activity resides in a special kind of soul, the sensitive soul. Common experience, moreover, testifies to the presence of three basic types of faculties in this soul, namely, those of sense knowledge, those of sense appetite, and the faculty of locomotion. These faculties and their vital activities will be considered in the order mentioned.

### *Part One: Sense Knowledge*

Sense knowledge results from the immediate action of material objects on the senses. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas distinguishes two groups of faculties in the realm of sense knowledge, the external senses and the internal senses. The first are moved directly by sensible objects, which cannot be perceived unless they are externally present. The second group obtains knowledge of material objects through the medium of the

former. Furthermore, since some of the internal senses retain the species of perceived objects, they can have a certain knowledge of them even in their absence. It should also be noted that the terms "external" and "internal" do not necessarily refer to location of the organ of sense. There may quite possibly be external senses in the body whose organs do not lie on the surface. For example, as understood by Aristotle the external sense of touch and its organ or organs are not on the outside, but within the body.

Some authors begin the study of the senses with a preliminary consideration of the metaphysical principles relating to knowledge in general. Such considerations, we think, are better left for the opening chapter on intellectual life, where they can be more fully applied. The present study of the senses, therefore, begins immediately with the analysis of sensation.

## I. THE EXTERNAL SENSES

Our discussion of sensation is based on Aristotle's treatment of the same problem in *De Anima*<sup>1</sup> and *De Sensu et Sensato*. In the main, St. Thomas follows the doctrine of Aristotle, though sometimes his procedure and arrangement of the matter are slightly different.<sup>2</sup> Later commentators, John of St. Thomas especially,<sup>3</sup> have added their own developments to the subject, so that in handling the various sources care must be had to identify the personal contributions of each author.

### 1. *The Problem of Sensation in Aristotle*

Almost invariably the first reaction of modern psychologists to the Aristotelian doctrine of sensation is one of bewilderment. This impression arises not only from a difference of tool and

<sup>1</sup> Bk. II, chaps. 5-12.

<sup>2</sup> Besides his commentary on the corresponding portions of Aristotle, see the *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 78, a. 3 and the *Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, Pars IV, qq. 4-6.

technique, but even more from the way the whole problem is conceived. In the Aristotelian discussion of the matter one of the first questions to be raised, if not the first, is whether a faculty of sense knowledge is an active or passive potency. At the very outset, then, the problem revolves around the metaphysical topic of act and potency. Such an approach, it need hardly be said, is very different if not utterly foreign to the way modern psychology goes about its inquiry.

In any event, according to Aristotle sensation in its initial phase is a passivity, that is, a being acted on. To sense is in the first instance to undergo an action (*pati*), to be altered in some way. In this operation the active principle is the perceived object. This position manifestly is a reaction against the Platonic doctrine of sensation, which minimized the role of the sensible object. In the view of Aristotle the external thing itself somehow moves and determines the sense faculty, and sensation results from the faculty being moved and acted upon, that is, from a passion.<sup>4</sup> But the alteration undergone by sense is utterly irreducible to the modification that results from a purely material thing being subjected to an abrasive or frictional action. The sense faculty, at least in normal sensation, is in no way impaired by reason of its passive role; on the contrary, in being thus acted on, it attains its proper perfection. All this is by way of saying that when the sense faculty receives a form, the mode of reception is utterly different from receiving a form in the entitative order. This difference is construed as the capacity of sense to receive the form without the matter. We are about to see how St. Thomas avails himself of this point in developing the doctrine of sensation. For the moment keep in mind that for his master Aristotle, one of the most striking things about sensation is its passivity.

<sup>4</sup> In the Latin translation of Aristotle, "Sensus in moveri aliquid et pati accidit." Cf. *De Anima*, II, 5, 416 b 33.

## 2. The Passivity and Activity of the Senses According to St. Thomas

In substance, St. Thomas adopts the Aristotelian position set forth in the foregoing paragraphs. Thus, in the *Summa* he writes: "Now, sense is a passive power, and is naturally immuted by the exterior sensible."<sup>5</sup> The same view is expressed in the Commentary *De Anima*. "To sense," he asserts, "consists in being moved and acted on. For, when the sense is in act, it undergoes a certain alteration. But when a thing is altered, it is moved and acted on."<sup>6</sup>

Sensation, then, is the result of an object acting on sense, which, from this point of view, must be considered a passive potency. But is it only passive? Do we not also, and as a matter of course, speak of the activity of sense? Certainly we do; and St. Thomas was not unaware of it. In some places, even, the more active role in sensation is seemingly attributed to the faculty itself or to the soul, instead of the object. For example, in the Commentary *De Sensu et Sensato*, speaking of sight he says: "Sight, considered in its being or reality, is not a corporeal passion,<sup>7</sup> but its principal cause is the power of the soul."<sup>8</sup>

Despite appearances, there is no discrepancy here. We have but to remember that in the process of sensation there are two phases: the passive phase, in which the sense is informed and determined by the external object; and the active phase, which properly constitutes the act of knowledge, and in which the informed faculty determines itself. This is how the commentators

<sup>5</sup> "Est autem sensus quaedam potentia passiva quae nata est immutari ab exteriori sensibili" (Ia, q. 78, a. 3).

<sup>6</sup> "Sentire consistit in moveri et pati; est enim sensus in actu quaedam alteratio, quod autem alteratur patitur et movetur" (In II *De Anima*, lect. 10, no. 350).

<sup>7</sup> That is, does not consist in being acted on corporeally.—[Tr.]

<sup>8</sup> In *De Sensu et Sensato*, lect. 4.

Passive corporeally  
Active spiritually.



in general explain the matter, and it may be that their interpretation lays more stress on the active side of sensation than does the literal text of Aristotle. Initially and fundamentally, however, sensation is a passivity or passive process.

St. Thomas on his part is careful to elucidate the special character of this passivity, which, as we have seen, is not to be confused with the passivity of matter.<sup>9</sup> He notes that a subject receiving a form may receive it, and so be affected, in two ways. In other words, the modification of the subject may be of the <sup>(1)</sup>material order, and this he calls a natural immutation, *immutatio naturalis*; or, it may be of the <sup>(2)</sup>immaterial order, and this he calls a "spiritual" immutation, *immutatio spiritualis*. In the first case, when the form is received the subject is changed in its natural being, <sup>(1)</sup>*esse naturale*; in the second case, it is modified in its intentional or objective being, <sup>(2)</sup>*esse spirituale*.

Both types of alteration may be present in sensation; but it is the so-called spiritual immutation that gives the immediate and proper determination to the act of knowledge. Indeed, the unique passivity that characterizes the fact of knowledge corresponds precisely to this second modification or informing of the knowing potency.<sup>10</sup>

It may be observed, moreover, that in the view of the ancients and Scholastics both types of passivity are in fact met with in the operations of the lower senses, touch and taste, since the organs of these senses are modified in their natural being. When the hand touches a warm object, it is actually and physically

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 78, a. 3.

<sup>10</sup> When St. Thomas speaks of "spiritual" change and "spiritual" being in regard to sense, he is evidently using the term in a wide acceptance, with no suggestion that sense knowledge requires a strictly spiritual principle. "Spiritual" here means simply that the change in question is more than purely material or physical. This notion of an "immaterial" operation that is not purely material and not purely spiritual is as difficult to grasp as it is imperative to maintain; for without this concept not only does sense knowledge become unintelligible, but also the basis for the essential difference between knowledge of sense and intellect disappears.—[Tr.]

warmed; at the same time the sense of touch has a cognitive experience of warmth. Smell and hearing, they believed, did not involve a physical modification in the sense faculty, only in the object. The bell, for example, vibrates when ringing. As for sight, this, they thought, resulted from an intentional or immaterial reception alone, without any physical change either in the organ or object of sight. Today, with more accurate methods of investigation, we should doubtless find that in every sensation there is also a physical change in the corresponding organ of sense.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. The Sensible "Species"

Sensation, to repeat, means the receiving of a form by a passive subject. What, exactly, is this form? In Aristotelian terminology it is called a "species." Sometimes it is further qualified as impressed species, *species impressa*, to distinguish it from the expressed species, *species expressa*. The first designates the form that is the principle of knowledge, whereas the second denotes the form that is the term of knowledge, or the object as known. St. Thomas himself speaks only of "species," without the qualifications "impressed" and "expressed," and by species he means the form that constitutes the principle, or initiatory phase, of knowledge. For form as known he uses other expressions. We shall do likewise.

a) *The reason for the species.*—The proper function of a species, whether sensible or intelligible, is to cause the exterior object to be present to the faculty of knowledge. With the exception of the divine essence in respect of the beatific vision, and the angelic substance in respect of the angelic intellect, a knowable object of any kind cannot form a cognitional union with a knowing faculty except through the medium of a species or form. This is twice true of the sense object, which is material and therefore has to be raised to a preliminary degree of im-

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Text III, "Internal Senses and External Senses," p. 245.

materiality even for sense knowledge. In the species the object possesses this prerequisite mode of immateriality and can therefore determine the act of sensation in its initial stage, but it is the sense faculty itself, after being informed by the species, that actively elicits the act of sensation.

b) *The production of the species.*—As Descartes rightly suggested, species must not be thought of as elf-like creatures, flitting unceasingly to and fro. In other words, the production of the species does not consist in dislodging a form from the object to the faculty of knowledge, but simply in the actuation of the faculty through the influence of the object.

It may be asked, however, whether this influence can be brought to bear on the faculty in a direct manner and by the sole power of the thing perceived. This point does raise something of a difficulty. Before the object can specify a potency in its own order of operation, the object itself must be in act in the same order. In intellectual knowledge, for example, whose object at first is not intelligible in act, a special power, the agent intellect, is required to render it actually intelligible. Is such a special power necessary for sense knowledge? Is there need, in other words, of an agent sense, as it were? St. Thomas does not think so. In contrast to objects of the intellect, objects of sense can be considered as already in act, that is to say, as already existing on a level in which they can actuate the senses immediately and thus determine the formation of the sensible species.

#### 4. *The Object of Sense Knowledge*

a) What, strictly speaking, is the object of sense knowledge? How much, that is, of the reality of external things do we reach through sensation? Certainly not their total being. Like every faculty of knowledge, the senses can have a direct apprehension of forms only:

*objectum cujuslibet potentiae sensitivae est forma prout in materia corporali existit.*



More precisely, it is not the substantial form or the essence of things that is perceived by sense, but only accidental forms; and not even all of these. The senses, it seems, grasp only accidental forms that are external to the object:

*sensus non apprehendit essentias rerum sed exteriora accidentia tantum.*

In a word, the object of the senses is the third group or species of qualities, properly known as sensible qualities, together with the quantitative determinations of bodies. Sens. qual.  
quant. det.

b) In a well-known passage of *De Anima* Aristotle groups the objects of sensation into three main classes, naming them proper, common, and per accidens.<sup>12</sup>

The proper sensibles are the particular objects of each of the five external senses, namely, color, sound, odor, taste, and the aggregate of qualities perceived by touch, such as warmth, cold, weight, resistance, and the like. They are called proper because they pertain each to one sense only. Moreover, since the proper sensibles specify each its own sense, they must be specifically distinct one from another. Accordingly, each sense perceives its own sensible and cannot be affected by the sensible of another.

The common sensibles, as their name implies, can be perceived by more than one sense. By common agreement there are five such sensibles: size, shape, number, movement, and rest. Sight, touch, and perhaps hearing, have a certain perception of these qualities. The common sensibles, however, are not completely independent and separate objects of sense; they always presuppose the knowledge of the proper sensibles, upon which they impose a further modification. Thus, when I see a colored surface, properly speaking it is the color of the surface that specifies my sight; but the size or extension is also known by sight, and it could be known by some other sense as well.

The sensible per accidens is not directly apprehended at all

<sup>12</sup> *De Anima*, II, 6.



by the senses, but is joined to things that are sensed. I may, for instance, see a colored object, which turns out to be an animal; so I say that I see an animal. Not being directly perceived by sense, these sensibles, it is clear, are not a real issue in any given doctrine of external sense knowledge.

### 5. *The Objectivity of Sense Knowledge*

It is on this aspect of sense perception that we find the most complete opposition between the ancient and Scholastic doctrine, which is on the side of realism, and the newer philosophies, which run to subjectivism. The question is whether the senses give us a grasp of the external world as it really is; or whether our sense knowledge is only an approximation to reality, that is, only more or less objective; or, going yet further, whether it is a mere symbolical awareness, that is, only a symbol of reality, and nowise an immediate apprehension of external things.

The matter under discussion here is the objectivity of the proper and common sensibles only, and of the latter simply as perceived by an external sense, and not necessarily as interpreted by the internal senses. Therefore, we are not now speaking of the objectivity of the sensible *per accidens*, nor, as we have said, of that aspect of perception in which the internal senses or the intellect elaborate on the immediate data of sense. The present discussion, moreover, represents only one phase of the wider problem regarding the objectivity of knowledge in general. We shall consider the problem from its broader point of view when treating of the intellect and the apprehension of being. Here, then, the point of inquiry pertains only to the immediate datum of each external sense.

a) *The position of Aristotle and St. Thomas.*—On this question the position of Aristotle and St. Thomas is one of unequivocal realism or objectivity; in their view the immediate data of sense are objective. But they are not unaware of the

complexity of the problem, showing themselves wise and circumspect in stating their position. From the outset, Aristotle in particular is careful to leave the way open for qualifications, but without prejudice to his fundamental thesis. What he wants above all to refute is the theory of Protagoras, who seemed to think that when sensation ceases, the object likewise ceases to exist. That the object which produces the sensation should vanish just because the sensation is interrupted, such a view, declares Aristotle, is impossible and absurd. Sensation is certainly not of itself. Apart from sensation there is something else that necessarily exists prior to it.<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, moreover, repeats again and again that in the act of sensation there exists an identity or oneness between the sensible object and the sentient subject, between the perceived and the perceiver. Hence, with respect to the proper sensibles there can be no error in the senses.

St. Thomas also affirms the objectivity of sensation, doing so in terms that exclude all ambiguity. As an example, take the following remark on color. "Sight," he says, "sees the color of the apple apart from its smell. If therefore it be asked where is the color which is seen apart from the smell, it is quite clear that the color which is seen is only in the apple."<sup>14</sup> Once again, however, we must be warned as to what the realism of St. Thomas and Aristotle does and does not entail. We have already said that it pertains only to the proper sensibles and to the common sensibles as perceived by an external sense; also, that it refers only to the external accidents, for the essence of a thing is not within the reach of the senses. In addition, it is well to remember that sense itself cannot formally judge the objectivity of its knowledge, since this activity presupposes reflection in the strict sense of the word and is therefore found in intellect alone.

There are other qualifications to be noted. In more than

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Metaph.*, I, 5, 1010 b 30 ff., and *De Anima*, III, 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 85, a. 2 ad 2.

one place St. Thomas, speaking of error in the senses, explicitly acknowledges a certain relativity in sense knowledge.<sup>15</sup> It is a fact of common experience, he remarks, that a thing seems small or large according to the distance from which it is seen. It is the nearer view one must take as the basis for an objectively true judgment. Similarly, the color of a thing may change with distance. Here again the nearer view is the correct one. Besides, the common sensibles may be the occasion for many false impressions. Even the condition of the sense organs has to be reckoned with; if these are diseased or otherwise abnormally affected, as in fever and jaundice, sensation itself is correspondingly marred and disturbed. To add to this, the general bodily disposition of the perceiving subject can be a source of error. To one who is physically weak, a light object may give the sensation of being heavy.

Considering, therefore, the various provisos we find in St. Thomas, we may assume that if he had had the benefit of the many additional facts brought to light by the methods and techniques of modern psychology, he would have been disposed to make even further concessions in the direction of relativism. Nevertheless, the basic position remains that for him as for Aristotle the sense faculty is, in the first instance, devoid of all content; that all of its specification comes from the object; and that under normal conditions at least, we perceive the sense qualities as they are in reality.

b) *The contributions of John of St. Thomas.*—In general, the commentators of St. Thomas follow the aforesaid doctrine regarding the objectivity of sense knowledge, elaborating it here and there with refinements of their own. Of such additional developments John of St. Thomas offers as many, perhaps, as anyone else, if not more.<sup>16</sup> There are two points in particular

<sup>15</sup> Cf. especially *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 14, nos. 694 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, Pars IV, q. 6, a. 1, "Utrum requiratur necessario quod objectum exterius sit praesens ut sentiri possit," and a. 4, "Utrum sensus externi forment idolum seu speciem expressam ut cognoscant."



that he underlines with respect to the doctrine of realism in sense knowledge.

His first observation is that sense knowledge is experimental or intuitive, as compared with the abstract knowledge that the intellect has when it grasps, in a direct but abstracted concept, the essence of the concrete reality. Experimental knowledge means, and this is essential to it, that the known object is physically, that is, concretely, present to the faculty of knowledge. John of St. Thomas insists that unless we hold to this immediate quality of sense knowledge, not only its own objectivity but also that of intellectual knowledge is in jeopardy, because thought begins with, and ultimately rests on, the knowledge of the external senses.

In a similar concern to safeguard the immediacy of sense knowledge, John of St. Thomas declares that the sense, in contrast to the intellect, does not attain its object through the formation of an expressed species. Sense knowledge—leaving aside the internal senses—has no other term than the thing itself or its objective qualities, which are known immediately by the senses. Such an expressed species is not needed here because the thing itself, in its concrete reality, is present with such a directness that it can be apprehended immediately and thus be the term of the act of knowledge. Another reason is that act of knowledge, being an immanent activity, belongs to the predicament of quality, and so does not necessarily require the production of a term. In the present instance, namely in external sense knowledge, the thing itself contains whatever is needed to terminate the act of knowing. The production of an expressed species as the term of this knowledge would not only be superfluous, but also ruinous to its immediacy, and therefore to its objectivity.

c) *Some modern Thomists on the relativity of sense knowledge.*—The extensive investigations of modern psychology have brought to light a variety of problems regarding sensation. In their anxiety over these problems some modern Thomists



have undertaken to revise the older doctrine by giving it a more relativist leaning.<sup>17</sup>

One of their important changes from the standpoint of objectivity consists in giving the primary qualities (quantitative aspects) a preferred status over the secondary qualities (qualitative aspects). According to this understanding, the attribute of extension in its various forms is grounded in reality as we perceive it, but the qualitative aspects of our sensory impressions are not objective. Even if there is something in reality that corresponds to each quality perceived, and thus forms the basis for the specification of sensation, there is no authentic likeness between the quality as perceived and as existing in reality. Such a view, of course, is nothing less than a radical transformation of the older doctrine. For St. Thomas it is precisely in the perception of the proper sensibles (qualitative aspects) that we have the greatest guarantee of objectivity; error, if it occurs at all, arises only in connection with the perception of the common sensibles (quantitative aspects).

Not all Thomists carry their revisions to such extremes. According to some the perceived sensible is objective, and known immediately, but it is not fully realized or actualized before contact with the sense organ and the sense faculty. Since, moreover, it is thought that both the external environment and the disposition of the organ or the subject may greatly modify the circumstances attendant upon sensation, the upshot of this interpretation is that the object as existing in reality is not necessarily identical with the psychological representation we have of it.

d) *Conclusions.*—What is one to make of these newer explanations? There is no doubt that St. Thomas, following Aristotle, unequivocally affirms the objectivity of sense qualities. It is also certain that when the facts demanded it, he did not

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, J. Fröbes, S. J., *Psychologia Speculativa* (Freiburg im Br.: Herder & Co., 1927) I, pp. 108 f., 124 ff.

hesitate to allow for a certain amount of relativism alongside of his basic position. The question is whether we can go beyond these concessions made by St. Thomas. The answer would seem to be a clear-cut yes. There is no reason why we should not, for example, make even greater allowance than he for the role of the medium and the sense organ; why, in other words, we should not admit that the object as perceived by us is not the object in its naked reality, as it were, but as somehow existing on the level of the sense faculty, which has a certain influence on how the object is perceived.

But may we go even further and say that sense qualities as perceived are mere symbols of the real qualities of things, very useful symbols, it may be, but nothing more. The very nature of sense makes it impossible to give an absolute answer to this question on purely empirical or introspective grounds, because sense, unlike intellect, lacks the power to reflect on its act and to determine the precise validity of its knowledge. Be that as it may, one thing remains certain. If we want to cling to the Thomist doctrine of sensation, we must also adhere to the basic immediacy and objectivity of sense knowledge.

## 6. *Sense Faculties and the "Medium"*

For a better understanding of sense knowledge, a few points should be made clear regarding the structure and working of sense faculties.

a) *The nature of sense faculties.*—It is apparent that sense faculties are organic powers and therefore depend not only on the soul in which they have their source and principle, but also on the body, in which they manifest themselves through component parts forming well-defined organs. Even the mere superficial attention to sensation reveals this fact. It follows that in the state of separation from the body the soul retains its sensory powers only in principle, or radically, and cannot perform the acts of sense.

Since, moreover, the senses are not utterly spiritual powers, they cannot reflect on themselves in the strict meaning of the word; which means they cannot have a clear and distinct knowledge of their own activity. Aristotelian psychology does, however, attribute a manner of reflection to one internal sense, the common sense; and to this extent one may speak of a sensory self-awareness or consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

As for the physiology of sense organs, Aristotle took great interest in it. But it should not surprise us that some of his statements on the matter, though not lacking in discernment, stand in need of considerable review and rounding out. One of his more basic and more durable ideas in this connection was that sense had to be devoid of whatever form it was to receive. To illustrate, the pupil of the eye could receive all colors because it was itself colorless, being formed, so to speak, of water.

b) *The "medium" in sense knowledge.*—That sensation requires both the sense faculty together with its organ and an object to determine the faculty is obvious enough. Perhaps not so immediately evident is the further and universal need of a certain auxiliary agency called the "medium." Nevertheless, the existence of the medium is verified on two grounds.

First, with respect to three senses, sight, hearing, and smell, the medium is simply a fact of experience. In these senses the organ is separated from the sensible object by a greater or lesser gap of air or moisture, which, it is apparent, serves as a medium of transmission. Secondly, it is also a clearly demonstrable fact that the suppression of the medium may entail the suppression of the sensations in question. Placed squarely against the eye, the colored object is no longer perceived as colored; and if the sounding object is brought too close to the

<sup>18</sup> It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the "reflection" attributed to the common sense is largely a manner of speaking, having nothing in common with reflection as applied to intellect. What this reflection means is that the common sense in some way knows the operations of each external sense, not that it can reflect on itself or its own act.—[Tr.]



ear, what had been a distinct sound becomes a jumbled noise. It would seem that the energy emanating from the sensible object has to be refracted by a medium before it can suitably move the organ. Curiously enough, Aristotle also holds for a medium in the case of touch and taste, where, in contrast to the aforesaid senses, direct bodily contact with the sensible object appears to be necessary. Still, there is a medium for these senses, which is the surface flesh of the body. The organs of touch and taste, on the other hand, are internal to the surface.

Like the organs of sense, the medium must be in a state of neutrality to the forms it is to receive and transmit. Thus, the "diaphanum," which is the medium for sight, is colorless; and in like manner the medium for sound would be soundless. In touch and taste the medium, as we have said, is the surface flesh. Since this is composed of various elements with qualities of their own, the medium in this case consists in a certain balance or "mean" between the tangible qualities inherent in the flesh. When the latter is in this mean condition, the organ of touch is receptive to such tangible qualities in the external object as exceed that mean in either direction. Accordingly, the hand that is in a mean condition can perceive hot or cold in the object it touches.

In the Aristotelian doctrine of sensation, therefore, the medium plays a very important part. As already indicated, its first role is one of transmission with respect to the form received by the senses. The ancients and Scholastics also ascribed to it a protective function in regard to the organs of sense, seeing that direct physical contact with the object might be harmful to them. Certain commentators, moreover, believe that the medium also serves to "immaterialize" the forms to be received by the senses. The medium then would be the instrument whereby forms become actually sensible, or sensible in act.



### 7. *The Number of External Senses*

Before the number of external senses can be assigned we need to know the basis on which one sense differs from another. This basis cannot be the organs, since these are relative to the senses and exist for their sake. Much less, on the same ground, can it be the various mediums serving the senses. Nor can it be the different natures of sensible qualities; for, as St. Thomas argues, considered in the abstract these are not sensibles but intelligibles, and only intellect can know the natures of sensible qualities. The basis, however, for the number and distinction of the senses must be found in something that pertains formally to sense, namely, in the qualities that are individually proper to the senses, meaning the proper sensibles.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, it is on the basis of the proper sensibles that Aristotle enumerates five different senses, a classification that has become perennial and classical.<sup>20</sup> Aristotle gives no further a priori reason for his enumeration, which would seem therefore to rest simply on common observation. St. Thomas, who usually makes it a point to find an intrinsic reason for such groupings, provides us with two separate interpretations for the number and distinction of the external senses.

a) One explanation begins with the degree of immateriality pertaining to a sense, the immateriality being inversely proportional to the scope of physical alteration attending the so-called "spiritual," that is, immaterial "immutation" of sense. Highest in rank, from this point of view, would be sight, since the ancients believed it involved no bodily change at all. Below sight belonged hearing and smell, which entail a modification in the object. Lowest of all would be taste and touch, which imply an alteration not only in the object but also in the organ. Generally speaking, the principle underlying this interpretation,

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 78, a. 3, and *Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *De Anima*, II, 6-11.

namely, the <sup>①</sup> criterion of immateriality, is certainly as valid today as it was for St. Thomas; the details of the scheme, however, would need to be considerably retouched in the light of present-day knowledge.

b) In the Commentary *De Anima* <sup>②</sup> 21 St. Thomas classifies the senses according to their usefulness and purpose in animal life. All living things, he observes, must have a nutritive power, but not all need to have faculties of knowledge. Animals of course do, but even among them some require more senses than others. From this approach St. Thomas discovers two broad classes of senses: first, the lower senses, which are so fundamental that without them animal life is simply impossible, namely, touch at the very least and, perhaps, taste; secondly, the higher senses, hearing, smell, and sight, which represent a much more perfect degree of animal life and are capable of perceiving their objects from a distance. This twofold division has its justification in the fact that higher animals must move about from place to place to provide their sustenance, a condition which, plainly, calls for a greater number of senses. Lower animals, on the other hand, find their means of subsistence within immediate reach; not being compelled to forage, as it were, they can do without the ability to perceive objects from a distance. This again, admittedly, is a very ingenious and resourceful explanation, but also one that is not easily verified in every detail.

*Problem regarding touch.* Is the sense of touch one or many? What has given rise to this question is the great variety of sensory experiences commonly attributed to touch, such as the sensation of muscular effort, of light and heavy, of warm and cold and pain, to mention the more obvious ones. St. Thomas himself had some doubt in the matter, leaning to the view that touch is a kind of genus embracing several species.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> In *III De Anima*, lect. 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 7, a. 3 ad 3.

Modern psychology takes for granted the existence of a special kinesthetic and muscular sense as well as a temperature sense; whereas the experience of pain is thought to belong to the emotional side of human experience. Aristotle, on the other hand, showed some inclination to assimilate taste to touch, considering taste as a kind of touch that is restricted to the tongue.<sup>23</sup>

### 8. *The Aristotelian Theory of Sight*

The Aristotelian theory of sight, which in general is adopted by St. Thomas, deserves separate treatment not only for its own sake but also for the special applications that are made of it both in philosophy and theology, such as in the matter of intellectual knowledge and in the doctrine of faith and the beatific vision.<sup>24</sup>

The object of sight is the visible. Within the realm of the visible we find two things, color and the illuminable. Color is visible in itself, whereas the illuminable is only visible through color. Considering the matter more closely, we note, furthermore, that all bodies, whether transparent or opaque, have in common a certain quality, the diaphanum or transparent (*perspicuum*). Of itself, the diaphanum is a pure potency; it is actualized by fire or the celestial bodies, and when in act, it is light. But light itself is only a principle of visibility; it does not become visible in fact until it is actualized by color, which then becomes the limit or extremity of bodies. Therefore, an object will be actually visible when its diaphanum (which it has in common with other bodies) is illuminated by light (that is, reduced by fire or the celestial bodies to its act, which is light) and furthermore determined by color. In all this, to be noted, there is no trace of local movement; the whole process is a qualitative alteration.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Text III, "Internal Senses and External Senses," p. 245.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *In II De Anima*, lect. 14-15, and *In De Sensu et Sensato*, lect. 2-9.



In *De Sensu* Aristotle opposes this theory to the emission theory of sight taught generally by Plato, Empedocles, and Democritus. Sight, according to these philosophers, is to be interpreted as a luminous ray emanating from the eye. Empedocles, if not the others, thought that the eye consists of fire, and therefore is capable of emitting rays that make it possible to see surrounding objects. Another version of the theory is that exterior bodies also send out minute particles, and sight results from the stream of rays encountering the stream of particles.

Aristotle rejected the notion that the eye is a sort of luminous center emitting rays of light; nor did he believe it to consist of fire, but rather of water, and its role in relation to the object was one of pure passivity. His basic color, moreover, was white, to which black was opposed as its absence or absolute minimum. The intermediate colors were formed of mixtures of black and white.

## II. THE INTERNAL SENSES

The external senses perceive the proper and common sensibles, and only when they are present. Experience teaches, however, that sense knowledge in some way goes beyond the immediate perception of objects. We can, so to speak, store up our sensations and reproduce them at will. Furthermore, we can compare and relate them with one another, directing them to our practical needs. Such activities compel us to admit the existence of sensory powers that exceed the scope of the external senses. These powers are the internal senses.

As is his custom, St. Thomas presents a priori or deductive grounds for the existence of these senses.<sup>25</sup> Two reasons in particular seem to establish the need of them. For one thing, the more perfect animals, as noted in connection with the external senses, have to move from place to place to secure their wants;

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 78, a. 4.



sense of need  
sense of danger

they must then be able to represent sensible objects to themselves even when not present. Also, they need some way of knowing what is advantageous to them, and what not; consequently, they require a sensory power by which they can perceive what is useful and what harmful. Clearly, such a power goes beyond the mere external perception of sense objects. It is by means of this power, to use a classical example, that the sheep, seeing the wolf, flees, fearing him not because of his color or appearance, but because it recognizes the wolf as an enemy.

experience

It cannot be denied that the aforesaid reasoning has its merits. Still, there is another way of coming to the matter. We can, and this is perhaps more fundamental, base the existence and distinction of the internal senses on the analysis of the objects known through sense knowledge. This analysis reveals certain "objective reasons" or formalities that cannot be reduced to those of the external senses. As in all such cases, we must acknowledge as many distinct powers as there are new and specifically distinct objects. In the Aristotelian tradition, four such objects are commonly admitted, to which correspond four internal senses, namely, the common sense, the imagination, the estimative power, and memory.

Combinations

Aristotle's discussion of the internal senses occurs mostly in *De Anima*<sup>26</sup> and in *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*. Besides his commentary on the corresponding chapters in Aristotle, St. Thomas also has a summary of their content in the *Summa*<sup>27</sup> and in *Quaestio Disputata de Anima*.<sup>28</sup> These discussions, which to the casual reader may here and there seem a trifle forced or factitious, will on closer examination reveal a large store of sound observations as well as fine psychological insight.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Bk. III, chaps. 1-3.

<sup>27</sup> Ia, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>28</sup> A. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Text III, "Internal Senses and External Senses," p. 245.

① Common sensibles  
② Reflective power  
StTh. ③ Comparison, discrimination in objects known by external senses

## 1. The Common Sense

Unfortunately the term "common sense" (Latin: *sensus communis*) is very ambiguous in the vernacular.<sup>30</sup> The student in psychology, therefore, should note very carefully what it means in the present context.

Aristotle ascribes three functions to the common sense. First, in conjunction with the external senses it perceives the common sensibles.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, it performs a certain reflective function in regard to the activity of the external senses.<sup>32</sup> Thirdly, it can discriminate between and compare the objects known by the several external senses. Of these three functions, St. Thomas considers only the last two.

a) *Sensory Consciousness*.—Each of the external senses has, it appears, a certain awareness of its activity; at least it is vaguely aware of its operation when in operation.<sup>33</sup> But this

<sup>30</sup> Because of this ambiguity some contemporary authors of Thomistic psychology textbooks in the vernacular have resorted to substitutes. T. V. Moore, *Cognitive Psychology* (New York, etc.: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1939), calls it *synthetic* sense; C. N. Bittle, *The Whole Man* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1947), the *central* sense; G. B. Kluber-tanz, *The Philosophy of Human Nature* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953), the *unifying* sense. Doubtless, these and like coinages have their merit, but it is a moot point whether they will succeed in ousting the usage-sanctioned *common sense*.—[Tr.]

<sup>31</sup> This does not mean that the common sensibles are the proper object of common sense in the way that the proper sensibles are the proper objects of the external senses. Cf. *In De Anima*, II, lect. 13, nos. 389 ff., and III, lect. 1, no. 580.—[Tr.]

<sup>32</sup> Cf. note 18, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> More formally, the external sense knows its act *in actu exercito*, but not *in actu signato*, a distinction that need not delay the novice too long, and which the advanced student will know how to construe. Briefly, it means that the sense does not reflect on itself and its act as objects of knowledge, but somehow is aware of its act in the exercise of the act, at least to this extent, as the author suggests, that in the act of perceiving its object the external sense undergoes a living "experience" that is not otherwise present.

On a more general note, it may not be trespassing too much on the

mode of awareness is very limited and imperfect, hardly deserving the name "reflection." Properly speaking it is the common sense that knows the acts of the external senses, and this is what is meant by saying that the common sense "reflects" on these acts.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it is through this sense that I not only see a colored object, for example, but also know that I see it; or know that I hear when I am hearing, and so on. In general, therefore, this sense induces and integrates what may be called sensory consciousness, which in man is almost inextricably inwoven with his intellectual consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

b) *The integration of sensations into meaningful units.*—The common sense not only has a certain awareness of the separate acts of the external senses, but also brings them together, so to speak, for comparison and integration. Such activity lies beyond the power of an external sense, limited as it is to its proper object. When, to take an example, I see a thing, it may not only be colored and extended to the eye, but also sonorous to the ear, and, if I touch it, coarse and cold to the hand. How is it that all of these separate and different sensations are experienced as belonging together in the same thing, forming a unified whole in my sensory awareness? The answer is that this is the work of the common sense. Without the integral and integrating perception of the common sense, the sensible object would be meaningless.

Because it has the power to compare and conjoin the separate data of each sense, the common sense must be in closest con-

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author's ground to remark in passing that sense knowledge, which in some respects is so evident, is in other ways even more a "mystery" than intellectual knowledge, for the very reason that intellect can reflect on itself, and sense cannot. Thus, we know how we know when it is time to make ready for winter, but how does the squirrel know? And yet he knows, though he neither knows that he knows, nor, much less, how he knows.—[Tr.]

<sup>34</sup> Cf. note 18, p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> In practice, it would seem that man cannot have sensory awareness that is altogether unattended by intellectual awareness.—[Tr.]



tact with the external senses. In fact, St. Thomas regards it as a common seat for all the outer senses, so that the apparatus of external sense knowledge in general may be considered as a group of individual faculties whose deepest roots lie in a common ground. Nevertheless, the common sense is a distinct power having its specific operations. Within the order of knowledge as a whole, it is like a relay station whose particular function is to convey to the higher faculties the first data of sense. According to Aristotle all animals necessarily have this one internal sense, whereas only higher animals are endowed with the others.

## 2. The Imagination

In the psychology of Aristotle the imagination fills a double role. It receives and conserves the sense impressions transmitted to it by the common sense; in this capacity it serves as memory, broadly speaking. Secondly, it reproduces sense impressions in the absence of the exterior object.

Because of this twofold activity which it is acknowledged to have, the imagination cannot be identified with any of the senses studied so far, not even with the common sense, which does not conserve and so cannot reproduce sensory images and impressions. St. Thomas is convinced that the activities of the imagination are altogether separate and distinct, so that a power that is only receptive and not retentive of its data, such as the outer senses and the common sense, cannot account for them. The imagination is also to be distinguished from the other internal senses: from the estimative power, which, as we shall see, apprehends certain nonsensed species and formalities that lie beyond the grasp of the other senses; and from memory, which always implies a reference to the past, something that is equally foreign to the other senses.

*The activity of the imagination.*—Modern psychology devotes much study to the various activities of the imagination,

(1) Reception & conservation  
(2) Reproduction



endeavoring to formulate as accurately as possible the laws relating to such phenomena as the reviviscence, the association, and the transformation of images. Among the ancients and Scholastics we find nothing to compare with these more thoroughly detailed and difficult investigations made possible by the advance in method and technique. For all that, however, our forebears had a deep appreciation of the pivotal role of the imagination in human conduct. For them, the influence of the imagination in regard to the emotions was simply fundamental; they also knew it as the faculty in which our dreams are unfolded; and they understood, perhaps better than many after them, that its spell and allurements were largely responsible for error invading the mind. Be it said, in review, that the discoveries of later psychologists in no way contradict these broad observations. Modern knowledge of the imagination finds easy lodgment within the framework of former ideas. The details are new, the substance the same.

### 3. *The Estimative and the Cogitative Power*

The doctrine of the estimative and the cogitative power (Latin: vis aestimativa and vis cogitativa) represents one of the most notable features of the Aristotelian and scholastic theory of sense knowledge. This doctrine, like every other in the Peripatetic tradition, stems from experience. It is a fact of common knowledge that animals seek or flee certain objects, not merely because they are pleasant or unpleasant to a particular sense, but also because they are useful or harmful to the nature of the animal as a whole. A sheep, as St. Thomas likes to repeat, flees the wolf, not because of his color or appearance, but because of his threat to the sheep's very existence. Similarly a bird gathers straws, not only to gratify its senses, but in furtherance of the nest it is building. Such formalities as usefulness and harmfulness, however, manifestly fall beyond the reach of the outer and the other internal senses. Nor, in the animal

at least, are they grasped by the intellect, which animals do not have. Consequently, we must fall back on a special sensory power whose proper object is the so-called nonsensed species or intentions, *intentiones insensatae*, the perception of which gives rise to certain motor and appetitive impulses.

As we have just intimated, the doctrine of the estimative power appears to have been evolved as an explanation for certain animal reactions that would otherwise be unaccountable. But similar reactions are observable in the sense activity of man; hence, there is every reason to affirm the existence of this internal sense in man as well. One can readily see, however, that in man's conscious life this faculty will have a very special role to perform, above all because of its influence in regard to the intellect, which is the higher faculty governing man's conduct. For this reason it has received a special name. Its counterpart in the Augustinian tradition is the lower reason, *ratio inferior*; but St. Thomas adopts the term we have already mentioned, namely, cogitative power. More precisely, the cogitative power differs from the estimative in that its field of operation is broader, but even more in that by reason of its adjacency to the higher faculties of intellect and will, and in regard to concrete, individual objects or images, it can institute a manner of comparison and discourse that borders on the strictly rational discourse of man. Hence also this other name for it, which is "particular reason," *ratio particularis*, denoting a certain "reason" or discourse on the level of particular, in contrast to universal, objects.

Because of its closeness to intellect—a closeness which, obviously, is not a spatial or temporal affinity—the cogitative power, to repeat, fulfills a most important role in the life of man. In general, its function consists in being a sort of mediating faculty between sense on the one hand, which grasps the material singular, and intellect on the other hand, which is the faculty of the abstracted essence. Thus, it serves to prepare the

immediate phantasms for the consideration of the intellect; and it is also instrumental in accommodating the higher commands of reason to the practical realm in the world of sense. If, for example, I intend to write something, it is through the cogitative power that my intellect is in cognitional contact with this individual pen I hold in my hand for the purpose in mind, namely, forming certain characters on white paper that lies before me.

Before leaving the cogitative power we should say a word about instinct, since one can hardly study the former without being reminded of the vast labors expended by the moderns on the latter. There is no doubt that the activity attributed to the cogitative power is in some way connected with the group of sensory activities that modern psychologists call instinct, or instinctive. As understood in the older psychology, however, the estimative or cogitative power corresponds only to the cognitional element of modern instinct, which also includes appetitive and locomotive factors. Considered in the light of the older view, instinct would bear a stronger intellectual or imaginal reference, but it would not on that account exclude the possibility of reflex activity that is absolutely independent of knowledge.

#### 4. *Sense Memory - groups*

The last of the internal senses, memory, has a limited and precise function. The mere conservation and reproduction of sensory impressions is, as said earlier, the work of the imagination. What the memory does is to store up the nonsensed species or intentions known by the estimative and cogitative powers. Thus it is able to revive these experiences in consciousness through recall of the appropriate species. But this is not all. The really distinctive characteristic of memory as understood by Aristotle is its power to represent past things as past: *sub ratione praeteriti*. Is it not, in fact, true that we say we



remember a thing when we can relate the presently revived awareness of it to its moment in the past? Yesterday, for example, I met someone. Today I have a sensory image of this experience in my consciousness, together with its temporal circumstance; today, then, I remember it.

It is an interesting question, and not at all self-evident, how the revived image of a sensory experience is actually brought into association with a determined moment in time. Certainly, it cannot in the first instance be the intellect that performs this function, because the intellect knows its object in the state of abstraction, thus prescinding from the course of time and motion. For this reason, also, purely intellectual memory does not exist in man. The answer must be sought elsewhere. The clue to the problem lies in the fact that time and motion go together. The immediate perception of movement is a sensory process, and this perception forms the basis for the perception of time. Accordingly, the temporal sequence of sensory experiences of movement is somehow inscribed in memory, and can therefore be reproduced by it. Any such experience has only to be presented anew to memory, either in fact or imagination, and it will be able to determine its temporal relation to other experiences.

In animals the recalling of the past takes place automatically, which is to say instinctively; but in man it may also come about through a studied search of the background of experiences that resembles intellectual inquiry. Therefore, even as man's estimative power is more perfect than the animal's and is called the cogitative power and the particular reason, so, for similar reasons, is man's memory more perfect and is called *remembrance*.

Here again, in the study of memory, modern psychology, it may be observed, has added much of real value to the knowledge of former times, particularly in the matter of determining more exactly the conditions governing the revival of past ex-



periences and their temporal sequence, such as the laws of learning, retention, and recall. But nothing has been found to change the basic definition of memory or to recast its proper object, which is the *ratio praeteriti*, the recognition of things as past, something that already Aristotle, with customary insight, so clearly defined. Speaking more generally, one of the great achievements of his philosophy is its contribution to the psychology of the internal senses, displaying as it does such notable success in discerning and determining the precise object not only of memory but of the other internal senses as well.

## Part Two: The Sensitive Appetite and the Locomotive Potency

The most ordinary reflection on our conscious life bears witness to the fact that in addition to acts of knowledge we also experience a great variety of acts and responses that belong to a different order, such as desires, volitions, feelings, and other inclinations. These experiences compel us to admit that over and above cognitive faculties we possess another group, which are called *appetitive* and *affective*. The term "appetitive" stresses the tendential aspect of their activities, that is, their tendency toward the object; whereas the term "affective" underlines their bearing in regard to the subject, which may be one of approach or retreat.

At the outset it should be understood that Aristotelian psychology, unlike more recent theories, links both the appetitive and the affective aspects of sensitive life to one and the same faculty or group of faculties. In other words, to desire or want an object, and to experience joy or sorrow from it, all these acts are produced by one basic faculty. What this means is that the whole of man's sensitive life contains, not three, but two basic kinds of faculties, namely, the appetitive and the

cognitive. This distinction, moreover, is founded on the more general metaphysical doctrine of action in general.

In the discussion to follow we shall restrict ourselves to the broad principles of St. Thomas' doctrine in the matter. Also, we are not here undertaking a detailed examination of the passions, a field which the ancients and Scholastics already explored with remarkable success; nor are we going to deal with the moral aspects of the passions. Briefly, then, instead of a psychological explanation in the modern sense, or a moral study, what follows is rather a summary of the general metaphysical doctrine of the sense appetite.<sup>36</sup>

## I. THE APPETITIVE POWERS

### 1. *The Existence of the Appetitive Powers in General*

Our starting point in regard to the sense appetite may well be the article in the *Summa* with which St. Thomas begins his consideration of the appetitive powers.<sup>37</sup> As this article assumes, the existence of sense appetite is a fact of experience. But the point at issue is whether the appetitive life of man requires a special faculty or group of faculties. Appetition in general is a universal occurrence, existing in both inanimate and animate beings. For this very reason one might think that all appetition is only an instance of that natural inclination of which all beings are possessed. What lends even more plausibility to this suggestion is that the various faculties of the soul seem to direct themselves toward an object, instead of being so directed by another power. Why, then, in addition to this inclination of nature, insist on a special power of appetition?

St. Thomas opens the whole question by invoking a princi-

<sup>36</sup> For St. Thomas' doctrine on the sensitive appetite the student may consult *Summa theol.*, Ia, q.80, aa.1-2; q.81, aa.1-2; and *De Veritate*, q.25, aa.1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Ia, q.80, a.1.

ple that governs its entire discussion, namely, that every form gives rise to an inclination: *quamlibet formam sequitur aliqua inclinatio*. Fire, to give an example, is by its nature inclined to rise, and to produce its like. For the present purpose, moreover, all beings may be divided into two kinds: those with the power to know, and those without it.

In beings that lack knowledge the form determines each to its own being alone, and this form is followed by a natural inclination which is called natural appetite: *appetitus naturalis*. This natural form and the consequent natural inclination are found also in beings that can know, but these can also possess the forms of other things, receiving them in their faculties of knowledge according to a higher mode of existence, which is called intentional existence. Corresponding to these forms, must be an equally higher mode of inclination, by which a being with the power to know is moved to seek the good it apprehends. This inclination goes by the name of animal appetite: *appetitus animalis*.

## 2. Divisions of Appetite

a) Natural appetite and animal appetite.—It will pay us to take a closer look at the division of natural and animal appetite, so as to get at the precise meaning of these terms.

Natural appetite denotes the natural inclination that arises from form universally. This inclination is simply the ever actual tendency that moves a form to seek its good or perfection. Like the form from which it naturally proceeds, natural appetite, therefore, has a very precise determination. It is by its natural appetite that a stone, for example, always gravitates toward earth; it is the nature of a stone to do so.

Animal appetite, on the other hand, results from a form received through knowledge. So it is that the animal in seeing his prey is moved to pounce on it. This kind of appetite differs from the other in several respects. Unlike natural appetite, it



is not continuously in act. Before seeing his prey the animal has the power to pursue it, but is not always being moved to do so. Animal appetite, therefore, is a power that can be reduced from potency to act.

Again, this power is distinct from the faculties of knowledge, a conclusion that follows from the respective activities of these two kinds of potencies being specifically distinct. The act of knowledge is assimilative and terminates in the subject; the act of appetite is a tendency away from the subject toward the object. Activities so different can be accounted for only by distinct faculties.

Another difference is that animal appetite, in contrast to natural appetite, is not limited to the natural form of the subject, but is capable of responding to as many forms, in practice unlimited, as the cognitive faculties are capable of receiving. Furthermore, if we consider only the appetite proper to each faculty, we meet with yet another difference; for the natural appetite of any faculty pertains only to the proper good of the faculty, whereas its corresponding animal appetite bears on the good of the subject as a whole. And since animal appetite involves the actuation of a potency, it is commonly referred to as "elicited appetite."

*Application to the faculties of knowledge and appetite.*—The foregoing distinction admits of application to the individual faculties of the soul; for, as St. Thomas observes, each power of the soul is a sort of form or nature, having a natural inclination to something. A faculty of knowledge, however, has only a natural appetite, which inclines it toward its object, such as the visible and the colored for sight. In regard to an appetitive faculty one can speak of two distinct appetites: its natural appetite, always in act, which tends toward the good of this faculty; and its elicited or animal appetite, which, after an act of knowledge, determines this faculty to the particular good apprehended. Accordingly, going back to our earlier ex-



ample, we find that the animal has in his visual potency a natural appetite for the whole visible order, and in his appetitive faculty another natural appetite for whatever can gratify this faculty. But let the animal meet his coveted prey or let his internal senses revive the image of prey previously sensed, and his appetitive potency will "elicit" the further act of desire that determines the process of prowl and capture.

b) *Sensitive appetite and intellectual appetite*.<sup>38</sup>—The distinction of sensitive and intellectual appetite offers no basic difficulties. Granted the specific difference of sense and intellect, this essential division is easily deduced. Since appetitive powers as a whole are passive potencies, they must be differentiated by the distinction of the active principles through which they are determined. These principles, however, are not all of the same nature, for some are the acts of sensory powers, and some of an intellectual power. But sense and intellect, we presuppose, are generically different. Consequently, there are two basic kinds of appetitive potencies, one pertaining to sense knowledge, the other to intellectual knowledge.

To be noted, also, is that whether a desired thing be apprehended by sense or intellect is not altogether irrelevant to it, since the aspect under which it is desired in the one case is formally distinct from the other. Sensitive appetite tends only toward particular goods as such, but intellectual appetite, which is the will, always desires these goods under some universal aspect of good. Consequently, even though tendencies of the will and tendencies of the sense appetite point to the same things existing outside of us, they do not seek them under the same formalities, and hence are not specifically the same. All of which is evidence enough that the faculties giving rise to these separate tendencies are also clearly distinct.

c) *Concupiscible appetite and irascible appetite*.<sup>39</sup>—In dealing with the sensitive appetite in particular, one of the first

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 80, a. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 81, a. 2.

things St. Thomas does is to show that this potency is generically one but comprises two distinct species, called irascible and concupiscible; a distinction, it may be added, that is not without its importance in moral doctrine. The principle on which this partition rests we already know, namely, that specifically distinct formalities in the object must be found with potencies that are equally different. The sensitive appetite, somewhat like the inherent forces of natural bodies, can tend toward two different kinds of objects or goods. Sometimes the object is easily good and easily attainable (or the evil easily avoided), a *bonum simpliciter*; and sometimes the good is difficult of attainment (or avoidance), a *bonum arduum*. The first is the object of the concupiscible appetite, the second of the irascible appetite. <sup>hard</sup> <sup>easy</sup>

That a desirable good is sometimes difficult and sometimes easy of attainment, needs no proof. But the question is whether such a circumstance is enough to make for a specific difference in the object, and hence in the faculty. St. Thomas leaves no doubt that in his view it is enough, and adduces a number of considerations in proof of his assertion. One point he makes is that the passions of these two appetites counteract each other, the rise of one commonly leading to the fall of the other, as when concupiscence calms anger and anger quiets concupiscence. Such an incompatibility would seem to require a corresponding difference of potency. Also, and this is perhaps more conclusive, the irascible and concupiscible appetites are moved by different faculties of knowledge, the concupiscible being moved by the common sense and the imagination, the irascible by the estimative power and memory. Everyday experience does, in fact, show that the external perception of an object or its internal representation by the imagination is enough to engender love and desire, which are passions of the concupiscible appetite; but in order to become angry one must have become aware of those nonsensical aspects in the object which only the higher internal senses, the cogitative power and

memory, can grasp. Through its dependence on the estimative, and in man on the cogitative, power, the irascible appetite, therefore, comes closer to reason and will.

Having established a distinction of kind in the two types of sense appetite, it is well to remember there is also a certain unity and continuity between them. The passions resulting from the one are related to and variously dependent on the passions arising from the other. Looked at more closely, we should find that the concupiscible appetite occupies a more fundamental position, and that the irascible not only proceeds from it, but is also appointed to serve it.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. *The Acts (Passions) of the Sensitive Appetite*

Under this heading fall all those acts of appetite that result directly from the sensible apprehension of a particular good or evil. Since the faculties eliciting these acts are organic powers, the acts necessarily involve bodily changes. Customarily, all these acts are called passions, regardless of whether the tendency or movement in question reveals itself actively, or gives the appearance of being a more passive disposition.

According to St. Thomas the concupiscible and irascible appetites give rise to eleven different passions between them. Named in the order in which, theoretically, they appear, they are as follows: love, which is at the root of all movements of the sensitive appetite, or hatred; desire or aversion; hope or despair; courage or fear; anger, which has no contrary; and joy or sorrow. Following the usual procedure, we leave it to moral philosophy to study in detail each of these passions of the soul.

## II. THE LOCOMOTIVE POTENCY <sup>41</sup>

Aristotle appears to have been very much preoccupied with the question whether a special faculty underlies the local move-

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Text IV, "Divisions of Appetite," p. 248.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *De Anima*, III, 9-11, and St. Thomas' Commentary, lect. 14-16.



ment of living beings. It is an undeniable fact that some animals, at least, move about spontaneously. What we want to know is whether such movement can be sufficiently explained by the vegetative or sensory powers we have studied. The vegetative powers may be dismissed out of hand. Not even the nutritive faculty, which is the most basic among them, is enough to account for the circumstance in question. For, the local movement of animals seems to be the result of an awareness of the end; consequently it presupposes the intervention of certain sensory experiences, and representations, and desires. These are not to be found in plants, and this is at least partly the reason why plants cannot move themselves locally.

Mere sensation, whether external or internal, is equally inadequate as an explanation, as appears from the fact that some animals are without the power of locomotion. If mere sensation does not account for local movement, shall we say that its source is to be sought in the intellect, assisted by the imagination and the sense appetite? These faculties, to be sure, are prerequisites for such activity, though only in man does intellect play a role. I may, for instance, be thinking of going to a certain place. If to my thought is added the desire to be there, I may well have an inclination to begin to move in that direction. Nevertheless, indispensable as they are, intellect and desire alone will not get me there. Also required if I am actually to move myself, is a special potency located in the motor structures of the organism. The paralytic, in whom this potency is disabled, finds it impossible to move from place to place, though his desire may be as strong, and his motor images as vivid, as another's. Doubtless, then, if the animal is to move itself locally, it not only needs to be directed by these higher faculties, such as knowledge and appetite, but it also needs to have and to actuate a special organic power that is the direct instrument of initiating such movements in the members as will result in a change of place.



These, in short, are the considerations that led Aristotle to posit the existence of a locomotive potency. This analysis should not be without interest to every serious student. Aristotle, it will be seen, was principally concerned with such local movement as results from sensory or intellectual awareness, being commanded either by free or deliberate will—this, of course, only in man—or by sensitive faculties in animals. By and large, modern psychologists, in addition to these conscious and sense-initiated movements, also admit the existence of a parallel network of automatic and unconscious reflexes, which can impel the locomotive potency to action without mediation from faculties of sense. Here, then, would be the place to insert a whole chapter on the psychology of the subconscious, a chapter, however, that St. Thomas did not write and to which therefore, keeping to the scope of the present work, we have no contributions to make.

## † CHAPTER 5

# *Intellect and Knowledge: General Notions*

### PRELIMINARY REMARKS

† OVER and above vegetative and sensitive activity, there is in man a still higher degree of life, that which is purely intellectual. In the intellectual as in the sensitive order, the Aristotelian tradition acknowledges two basic kinds of activity, which, as we have already seen apropos of sensitive life, are the activity pertaining to knowledge and the activity relating to appetite. Corresponding to these two kinds of activity on the intellectual level are the two great spiritual faculties of intellect and will.

In the remaining portions of this volume, therefore, we shall treat in order the problems concerning the intellect (chaps. 5, 6, 7, & 8), then those bearing on the will (chap. 9), and finally, coming back to the ultimate principle that is the common source of these two faculties, certain questions having to

do with the intellectual soul in its essential nature (chap. 10). The present chapter, then, the first in our study of man's higher life, is limited mostly to some preliminary remarks on intellect as understood by Aristotle and St. Thomas, and to some introductory notions about knowledge in general.

### 1. *The Primacy of Intellect - via media* Plato Democritus

a) So far in this volume we have considered those vital activities that man has in common with living beings of lower degree, with plants and animals. The study of the intellect, on the other hand, brings us to the level of life that is properly human. As St. Thomas observes: "The proper operation of man as man is the activity of the intellect."<sup>1</sup> The real import of this statement will be seen better from a comparison, even if only in their broader aspects, of intellectual knowledge, which is proper to man, and sense knowledge, which is common to man and animal.<sup>2</sup>

First, then, as St. Thomas says over and over, the object of the intellect is the universal, whereas sense can grasp only the singular: *intellectus est universalium, sensus est particularium.* What I see with my eyes may be a determined and particular plant, but my intellect begins by forming a general notion of plant. Secondly, the intellect can know nonsensible objects, such as the idea of truth or God, but sense is restricted to perceiving the corporeal aspects of things. The intellect, moreover, since it is a faculty with the power of reflection, can know itself and its activity—something that is not given to sense except, it will be recalled, to a very limited extent and in a rather loose meaning of the word. Lastly, with respect to the practical activities originating from sense and intellect, we find that those which depend on intellect and will are freely chosen, while

<sup>1</sup> "Propria autem operatio hominis in quantum homo, est intelligere" (*In I Metaph.*, lect. 1, no. 3).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Contra Gentiles*, II, 66, 67.



those arising from sense are determined by nature. A swallow, for example, always builds its nest in the same way.

Basically, the aforesaid differences result from the fact that the intellect is the faculty of being, capable of penetrating to the very essence of things, whereas sense cannot go beyond their external or individual characteristics. Consequently, from whatever aspect we consider him, formally speaking it is always by his intellectual activity that man is not simply an animal but an animal endowed with reason: *homo est animal rationale*.

b) If next we compare the spiritual operations of the soul itself, which are the operations of intellect and will, the same pre-eminence of intellect appears. An act of the will always presupposes an act of the intellect, which precedes the former and gives it content. Knowledge, therefore, has the stride over action, since the latter, in some ways, is only a result of the former. This priority is most prominent in the remarkable instance of the beatific vision, in which love results from contemplation. Aristotle himself was aware of the superiority of intellect, declaring knowledge for its own sake, that is, contemplation or "theoria," higher than the activities of practical life. All of which leads to this one conclusion: that the primacy among our faculties belongs to the intellect.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Aristotelian Theory of Intellect in Relation to Its Philosophical Antecedents

From the outset the Aristotelian doctrine of intellect and knowledge in general—indeed, his psychology as a whole—is conceived as a middle course between the materialist sensism represented in antiquity by Democritus, and the extreme intellectualism of which Plato was the initiator. St. Thomas has outlined the essentials of these different views in the *Summa*,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Text XIII, "The Superiority of Intellect over Will," p. 284.

<sup>4</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 84, aa. 1, 6.

displaying his genius for going to the heart of a problem. In substance, his remarks are as follows.

Particles  
are  
Material

According to Democritus, he says, all knowledge comes from an impression made on the soul by particles which emanate from bodies. This means that the intellect does not differ from sense. In Plato's view, on the other hand, not only is intellect a distinct power from sense, but even its activity cannot be ministered in any way by a bodily organ. Manifestly, then, the incorporeal, which is the intellect, cannot be affected by the corporeal, and so has to receive its content or ideas from a source outside the material world. Argument

Between these extreme views Aristotle adopted a more moderate position, which St. Thomas analyzes as follows. With Plato, Aristotle admits that intellect differs from sense; with Democritus, that the operations of sense are caused from impressions made on sense by exterior bodies, but not in the form of particles thrown off by bodies, as Democritus believed. As for the activities of the intellect, these are produced through the concurrent operation of sense and an active spiritual power, called agent intellect. The senses supply the acts of the intellect with their content or data, whereas the agent intellect educes the intelligible object from the sensible, in which the intelligible exists, not actually, only potentially. The further analysis of this entire process will take up much of the chapters to follow. For the moment, suffice it to note that the Aristotelian interpretation, which St. Thomas calls the "via Aristotelis," and which he was to make his own, appears to him for what it in fact was, a "via media," an intermediate solution avoiding the extremes both of sensism and intellectualism.

Aristotle's refutation of Plato and Democritus, however, was not pressed with equal force in each direction. The reason was that at the time he commanded the debate the issue regarding the existence of a mode of knowledge superior to sensation had been largely settled, as it would be at the time of St. Thomas. In

the main, therefore, the doctrine of knowledge both in Aristotle and St. Thomas takes the form of a counteraction, not so much to Democritus, whom of course they opposed, as to certain elements of Plato's intellectualism, elements they held to be extreme and unacceptable. For this reason the doctrine of sensism will occupy a secondary place in our study of the problem at hand; our principal encounter will be with Plato's doctrine, which, it ought to be remembered, St. Thomas came to deal with in the somewhat accommodated version of St. Augustine. Throughout this discussion, moreover, it should be borne in mind that our masters of a former age can scarcely be expected to have addressed themselves to the manifold and truly immense efforts of present-day psychologists. We shall be wise, then, not to press comparisons and similarities too far.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. *The Study of the Intellect in St. Thomas*

Even though Aristotle is the primary source of his doctrine of knowledge, including the doctrine of intellect, St. Thomas does not hesitate to fill in and round out his master's thought wherever he feels it necessary. As a rule his more personal views here as on other subjects, are found in the theological writings. The presentation of his doctrine of knowledge in these works is marked by fuller development and greater depth and richness than the more or less straightforward commentary on the text of *De Anima*. Hence, in the discussions to follow it will be to our advantage to take the two *Summas* and the *Quaestiones Disputatae* as our basic reference, with the texts of Aristotle in a secondary role.

It will also be helpful to remember that the approach to the problem is not the same in *De Anima* and the theological writings. With the former we are in the philosophy of nature, and the study of intellectual knowledge comes as the last stage of a long and laborious upward march, beginning at the lowest forms

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Text VI, "The Human Intellect Is an Abstractive Faculty," p. 253.



of life and culminating at the point where we meet with an activity transcending the limits of nature in the Aristotelian sense, the activity that is thought.

In the theological writings, on the other hand, the spiritual soul is simply taken as an initial datum; and it stands out, not so much as the highest entelechy or form in the world of corporeal living beings, but rather as a degree, albeit the lowest, in the hierarchy of spirits. Seen in this light, intellectual life comes to be understood not only through the medium of sensitive life, which leads up to it, but also through the medium of the life of pure spirits, the angels and God, in the likeness of whom the soul is made and lives. Many of the specific points and principles to be considered in the following chapters will not be justly appreciated unless they are measured against these higher realities, the entrance of which, incidentally, serves to complicate as well as to illuminate the answer to not a few problems.

#### *4. The Arrangement of Our Study of the Intellect*

Our first question has to do with the nature of knowledge in general, something we have deliberately omitted till now. What, then, is knowledge? And what is the metaphysical basis for the activity of knowledge? These are the first questions to be taken up and answered. Next, concerning man's intellectual knowledge, we shall have to consider its object and the process whereby the object is attained, analyzing first the initial stage of this process, and then its completed phase. After this, we shall speak of the several modes of intellectual knowledge, tracing the manner of its growth through the threefold operation of the intellect. Having done so, we shall direct our attention to a special mode of knowledge by which the intellect knows certain things which do not form part of its object in the proper sense, namely, the singular, the soul itself, and the

separate substances or pure spirits. Finally, our inquiry concludes with some remarks on the place of the doctrine of intellectual knowledge in the philosophy of St. Thomas.

All in all, then, our study of the intellect falls into eight principal parts. The first (i), as we have said, pertains to the nature of knowledge in general, and is treated in the remainder of this present chapter. The others are apportioned as follows to chapters 6, 7, and 8:

- Chapter 6: a) The object of the human intellect (ii).  
b) The formation of intellectual knowledge (iii).
- Chapter 7: a) The activity of the intellect (iv).  
b) The successive growth of intellectual knowledge (v).
- Chapter 8: a) The knowledge of the singular (vi).  
b) The knowledge of the soul through itself, and of other spiritual beings (vii).  
c) The place of the theory of intellectual knowledge in St. Thomas (viii).

## THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE IN GENERAL

### *1. The Unlimited Range of a Being Endowed with the Power to Know*

One of the first things one might consider in analyzing the nature of knowledge is that it gives us a sort of access to other things. When I open my eyes, a multitude of external objects appears before me. When I think, a whole world of other realities enters the field of my consciousness. This turning of my awareness to things that are not myself, strikes me as something that is practically unlimited in scope, permitting of endless repetition. I can look at a given scene a hundred or a thousand times, which is to say as often as I like; and I can also shift my

attention to any number of other views or objects. With respect to intellectual knowledge in particular, of all the things that are, nothing, so it would seem, lies wholly beyond its reach. Every being is "thinkable," that is, intelligible. Accordingly, it is within the context of such facts and observations as the preceding that one must look to find the meaning of the formula repeated so often in Aristotelian philosophy, namely, that through knowledge the soul, in some way, is all things, both sensible and intelligible:

*anima est quodammodo omnia sensibilia et intelligibilia.*<sup>6</sup>

In the view of St. Thomas it is precisely this capacity to assimilate and become all things that makes knowing and non-knowing beings formally different, as can be seen from this capital passage in the *Summa*:

Intelligent beings are distinguished from nonintelligent beings in that the latter possess only their own form; whereas the intelligent being is naturally adapted to have also the form of some other thing; for the idea (*species*) of the thing known is in the knower. Hence it is manifest that the nature of a nonintelligent being is more contracted and limited; whereas the nature of intelligent beings has a greater amplitude and extension; therefore the Philosopher says (*De Anima*, Bk. III) that the soul is in a sense all things.<sup>7</sup>

This quotation makes it clear that the difference of amplitude in question pertains to the possession or reception of forms. Every being has its specific form; but a knowing subject may also have the specific form of other things. Still, as St. Thomas explains, these two forms, that is, of the subject and of other things, do not have the same manner of existence in the knowing subject. We shall have occasion to come back to this point.

<sup>6</sup> In III *De Anima*, lect. 13, no. 787.

<sup>7</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 14, a. 1.



## 2. Concerning the Identity of the Intellect and the Intelligible Object in the Act of Knowledge

a) *The meaning of this identity.*—Knowing beings, we have just said, can become other things. But what is the exact meaning of this statement? Its obvious meaning is that at the term of the process of knowledge the knowing subject and the thing known are somehow one. Viewed from this aspect, knowledge consists in a certain identification of subject and object. This notion occurs in many places of *De Anima*. Following are some typical examples, to which many others could be added. “The act of the sensible object and that of the sentient subject are one and the same act.”<sup>8</sup> “There is that intellect which is such as to be able to become all things.”<sup>9</sup> “The soul in a way is all things.”<sup>10</sup> St. Thomas repeats the same thought many times, formulating it as follows:

*intellectus in actu est intellectum in actu.*

To get beyond the surface meaning of these and of similar expressions, consider a moment the interpretation of knowledge proposed by Democritus, since Aristotle offered his doctrine as a corrective to it as well as to Plato's. The basic idea of Democritus was that like is known by like. For him, this meant that the external elements, water, air, earth, and fire, were known respectively by the water, air, earth, and fire of which, in varying proportions, the organs of perception were composed. As was to be expected, Aristotle rejected the grossly materialist application of the Democritean principle. The external elements were somehow communicated to the senses, so much was sure, but not in their purely material reality; they were

<sup>8</sup> *De Anima*, III, 2, 425 b 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 430 a 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 431 b 21.

there by their similitude or likeness, known in formal language as "species."

Perhaps even more imperative in the eyes of Aristotle was it to insist that before the act of knowledge the object has no existence whatsoever in the knowing faculty. Initially, therefore, the so-called intelligible form exists in the intellect neither in act nor even in potency. In Aristotelian psychology it is simply a cardinal truth, if not indeed a truism, that originally the soul is like an empty slate, utterly unwritten, a *tabula rasa*. The intelligible object is not introduced until the act of knowledge begins; only then is it true to say that the intellect (in act) is the intelligible (in act). We see, then, that the formula in question has both a negative meaning, which is that the intellect (in potency) is not the intelligible object, and a positive meaning, namely, that when the intellect is in act it is identical with the intelligible object.

This principle may also be clarified from another quarter. In the study of motion in the *Physics* Aristotle had reached the conclusion that in motion the mover and moved have one and the same act, and that the subject of this one act is the thing moved. Applying this general principle to sensation, Aristotle affirms that in sense perception the sensible object and the sentient subject have a single act in common, residing in the latter.<sup>11</sup> The same conclusion holds for intellection, in which the intellect and the intelligible object become one, only here the identification is much deeper and much more perfect.

A question brought up in this connection is whether the identification of subject and object is to be understood of knowledge in its first act or initial phase (in which the faculty is informed by the "species quo," that is, the form by which the thing is known), or only in its second act or terminating phase (in which the faculty is informed by the "species quod," or the form known). To this question Aristotle himself does not

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *De Anima*, III, 2, 425 b 25 ff.

give an answer in so many words, since he does not make the explicit distinction of species "quo" and "quod." But we need not hesitate to reply for him. There is no doubt that in his opinion the identification takes place, proportionately speaking, at both moments of the act of the intellect. Immediately the external likeness is received, a certain union of subject and object ensues; but the union does not attain its full perfection before the consummation of the act of knowledge.

b) *The degrees of identification.*—The identification of subject and object is not all on the same level, but corresponds to the degrees in the hierarchy of knowing beings. St. Thomas says as much in several places.<sup>12</sup> In every case the mode of union is proportional to the degree of knowledge in question.

In God the union is of the highest possible kind, utter and absolute. In Him there is no real distinction of knower and known from any point of view. Since the divine being is immediately present to itself, God has no need of a species or likeness informing His intellect. His own essence is His intelligible species. In Him, therefore, the identity of subject and object is substantial and absolute. As St. Thomas observes: "Since . . . God has nothing in Him of potentiality, but is pure act, His intellect and its object are altogether (*omnibus modis*) the same."<sup>13</sup>

Again, if the knower and the known, though really distinct, are immediately present to one another from the standpoint of knowledge, no likeness or species of the known is necessary to mediate the union of knowledge. In this case the faculty is directly informed by the object, and the result is identity through immediate union of the two pre-existent entities. This circumstance obtains in the beatific vision and, as regards the "species quo," in the knowledge that a pure spirit has through his immediate self.

<sup>12</sup> For example, *In I Sent.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 1 ad 3, and *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 87, a. 1 ad 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 14, a. 2.



The human intellect occupies the lowest place in the scale of intellect. It cannot be immediately informed by the essence of external things. Hence, in order to know them it must first be informed by their likeness or species. Even so, here, too, one can speak of the identity of knower and known, though to a manner and degree that is clearly less perfect, yet surpassing the order of identity that prevails between knower and known in sense knowledge.

### 3. *The Immaterial Reception of Forms*

A comparison with certain occurrences in the world of physical realities will shed further light on the mode of identification we have been discussing. A knowing being, we have said, is distinct from nonknowing beings by reason of its capacity to have, over and above its own form, the form of other things. What is this additional informing, or reception of forms? Obviously, it cannot be the sort of reception that takes place between matter and form in the realm of physical nature. St. Thomas, quoting Averroes with approval, carefully notes that "forms are not received in the possible intellect in the same way in which they are received in first matter."<sup>14</sup> Consequently, there are two clearly distinct ways of receiving a form.

*Subjective or entitative reception.*—A being of physical nature is essentially constituted by prime matter, in the role of subject, receiving a substantial form as exclusively its own: *ut suam*. In this union of matter and form each of the two constitutive principles remains what it is and together with the other makes up a third something, the informed matter, which is the being of nature: the *ens naturae*.

*Objective or intentional reception.*—In the reception of a form by a knowing subject we have something quite different. The form to be known is not received by the knower as his own, *ut suam*, but as remaining the form of another, *ut formam rei*

<sup>14</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 2, a. 2.

*alterius*. Here, the subject (knower) becomes the object (thing known), and the result is an identification of the two rather than a third something. In the order of knowledge the union of subject and form is therefore closer than in the order of nature; yet each of the two members of the union, subject and form, knower and known, remains completely distinct from the other on the ontological or entitative level. To designate the union resulting from the reception of forms in the order of representation or species as opposed to the purely material reception in nature, it is customary to use the terms "objective" or "intentional" union.

#### 4. *Immateriality: the Essential Condition of Knowledge*

a) Our search into the nature of a knowing being needs to be pushed still further. A comparison of the two aforesaid ways of receiving a form will show that in subjective reception there is a certain restriction or monopolizing of the form by the subject. In other words, the subject confers a particularized or determinate existence, *esse determinatum*, on the form. In objective reception, nothing of the sort happens, so that a form so received does not have this restricted existence or *esse determinatum*.

The point we wish to make here is that according to the general principles of hylomorphism the restriction or determination of form comes from matter: *coarctatio formae est per materiam*. Consequently, a subject must be somehow immaterial if a form is to be received without being restricted to and determined by the subject. What this means is that immateriality is the quality of a thing that puts it on a level where it can know or be known. Immateriality, therefore, is, beyond all question, the essential condition of knowledge, *radix cognitionis*, to use a standard expression. St. Thomas states the principle this way:

*patet igitur quod immaterialitas alicujus rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitiva.*<sup>15</sup>

b) This immateriality has a meaning all its own. Certainly, as we had occasion to remark in the preceding chapter, it is not synonymous with pure spirituality. Nor is it merely the absence of physical matter; otherwise the angels, who are as much devoid of such matter as God, would be on the same level as He in regard to knowledge. In the present context immateriality is simply coterminous with nonpotentiality; therefore, it excludes all that makes for imperfection in a thing. We could use some other term to designate this quality, such as perfection or nonpotentiality; but the preferred term is "immateriality," mostly because the human intellect attains its knowledge by abstracting from matter. From this point of view, then, to know things means that they are released from matter, which is to say they exist in a state of immateriality. Act

Also to be noted is that immateriality as here understood does not have a purely negative meaning; it denotes a positive quality, that is, a perfection in a being. There are many passages in which St. Thomas correlates the quality of knowability or intelligibility with the degree of actuality in a thing. Thus he says, for example, that "everything is knowable according as it is actual,"<sup>16</sup> and that "the knowledge of every knower is measured by the mode of the form which is the principle of knowledge."<sup>17</sup> In these and similar remarks St. Thomas is merely giving positive expression to the notion of immateriality. For, it is all the same whether we say that a thing is knowable or intelligible so far as it is immaterial, or so far as it is in act.

<sup>15</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 14, a. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 12, a. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 14, a. 12.



c) Our final remark regarding the immateriality in question is that it applies to the subject as well as to the object of knowledge. The more a being is immaterial or in act, the more it is intelligible, and correlatively, if it is an intellectual being, the higher it is in the scale of intellect. This principle, however, must be taken with certain qualifications. For one thing, common experience shows that among lower beings, such as in the world of nature, all indeed possess a degree of actuality and can be objects of knowledge, but not all are knowing subjects. Besides, there are some spiritual entities, such as the will, which do not know. Thus, actuality or immateriality is the condition of knowledge, but not all that is actual or immaterial (nor even all that is spiritual) can know.<sup>18</sup>

### 5. *Entitative and Intentional Existence*

From what we have said about knowledge so far it can be seen that for every being there are two ways of existing, or two kinds of *esse*, absolutely differing one from the other. There is its natural existence, sometimes called "entitative," which is the existence a thing has in reality or apart from being known; and there is its intentional existence, which means the thing as known, or its existence in the knower as an object of knowledge. Through knowledge, that is, a thing exists in me, but quite differently than it exists in itself, or I in myself.

Within the framework of knowledge, therefore, "intentional" denotes everything that is known, considered as known. As existing in the mind, moreover, the object known is also named "intentio intellecta," the known intention. What needs to be stressed here, however, is that for St. Thomas the intentionality that characterizes knowledge does not at all imply an active tendency toward the object; it must be carefully discriminated from the intentionality of the will, which involves a real incli-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Text V, "The Basis of Intellection," p. 250.

nation toward the object. The reference to reality that is peculiar to knowledge has a purely representative character, without any real tendency toward the thing known.

In general, therefore, thanks to this notion of intentional existence, we can say that there are two great orders of being. One is the order of entitative being, which designates the existence of things in themselves. The other is the order of intentional being, which is a sort of proxy for the former and denotes the existence of things as known. This distinction is as indispensable as it is difficult to grasp. Cajetan's sage remarks on the matter deserve the fullest attention. "What bunglers they are!" he complains, "who, in treating of sense and the sensible, of intellect and the intelligible, of intellection and sensation, judge of these things in the same way as of other matters. Learn, then, how to train the eye of your mind on this higher ground, there to behold a new order of things." <sup>19</sup>

*The aforesaid doctrine and modern psychology.*—Before leaving this subject, we may ask ourselves what meaning the foregoing considerations can have for a modern psychologist. Doubtless, the various notions we have sought to elucidate are a far cry from the detailed and minute observations we find in a modern textbook of psychology. In short, the doctrine of knowledge we have outlined is set on a metaphysical plane. This doctrine, to be sure, appeals in some measure to experience and observation. Indeed, it begins with knowledge as a fact of experience; but the experience is studied in its most general aspects and in terms of a metaphysics of being, especially of natural, that is, bodily being, which is the constant point of reference.

It may be granted, then, that such a study holds out small attraction for anyone who intends at all costs to keep his inquiry on the empirical level. But if we want to probe beneath the surface, and if we have any curiosity at all as to the inner

<sup>19</sup> *Comment. in Iam Part.*, q. 14, a. 1, no. vii.

nature of knowledge, then we must come to the task prepared with metaphysical tools. Such a course is the more imperative when, with the feeble light of human understanding, we try to penetrate the world of spirits, whether of our own, which we can but faintly discern, or of God and the angels, which is wholly beyond our direct view. Before we can have some understanding of the workings of the spirit world, our notions from sense must be set to a metaphysical key; it is here above all, in this metaphysical transposition, that the principles of knowledge supplied by our former masters prove their truest and most abiding worth.



## † CHAPTER 6

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# The Object of Human Intellect and the Formation of Intellectual Knowledge

### Part One:

#### The Object of the Human Intellect

† IN Aristotelian philosophy a potency is specified, and thus defined, by its object. Since there are many kinds of objects, we must be clear as to the sort of object under discussion in the present chapter.

a) *The various objects of potencies.*—The first distinction that Scholastics generally make is that of the material object, which is the external thing known in its total reality, and the formal object, which is the precise aspect (of the thing) encompassed by the potency. St. Thomas, while not questioning

the legitimacy of this distinction, usually omits it. Ordinarily, when he speaks of object he means formal object.

As we pointed out in the chapter on sensitive life, the basic Aristotelian text on the distinction of objects occurs in *De Anima*,<sup>1</sup> where Aristotle notes three kinds relative to potencies. These are:

First, the proper object, which is what the potency apprehends immediately and through itself, *primo et per se*, as the accepted phrase has it. For sight, to mention an example or two, this is color, and for hearing, sound. With respect to this object, it may be remembered, a potency cannot err, at least if the conditions of perception are normal.

Secondly, the common object, which on the sense level includes several different objects known by more than one potency. Thus, according to Aristotle movement, rest, number, shape, and size constitute a general group of objects known as the common sensibles. Since man has but one intellectual faculty, we cannot speak of a common object on the intellectual level except in regard to the various degrees of intellect as a whole, namely, the divine, the angelic, and the human.

Thirdly, the incidental (per accidens) object, which is apprehended only indirectly by a given potency. Strictly speaking, this object is not perceived by the potency at all, but merely attaches to its proper object. To illustrate, it is incidental to my sight that the white object approaching is the son of my brother.

Concerning intellect, moreover, we must in addition to its proper object take account of its adequate or extensive object. The latter denotes everything this faculty can attain, including, therefore, certain things that are not comprised, or at best only incompletely and imperfectly, in its proper object. Practically speaking, the adequate object is the common object considered as answering to the ultimate capacity of a given intellect. More of this in the sequel.

<sup>1</sup> II, 6.

b) *Our plan of study of the object.*—Since the Aristotelian theory of intellectual knowledge takes the form, largely, of a reaction against the excessive intellectualism of the theory of ideas, we shall consider, first, the empirical leaning of this reaction. We shall then be in a position to define the proper object of the intellect as the quiddity (*quidditas*) of sensible things (I below).

But this return to a more moderate and more concrete intellectualism poses a new problem. If the intellect finds its proper object in the corporeal world, are we to say that it is prevented from knowing all that lies beyond this world, such as the pure spirits and God? If, notwithstanding, we hold that it can come to know these higher realities, we must explain how this is possible. Here, then, is the place for a more complete analysis of the adequate, in contrast to the proper, object of the human intellect (II below).

Next, assuming that the human intellect can rise above the world of nature, what limits, if any, must be assigned to its capacity? At the summit of the totality of things, we find the supreme intelligible, the divine essence. Can a created intellect have an immediate apprehension of this object? If so, how is its capacity for the divine to be construed? This question, you see, brings up the special problem of the beatific vision, which, to be sure, is primarily the concern of the theologian; but the philosopher, too, will find it to his advantage to consider certain aspects of the matter (III below).

## I. THE PROPER OBJECT OF THE HUMAN INTELLECT

### 1. *St. Thomas' Critique of Earlier Theories*

The best way to arrive at the definition of the proper object of the human intellect is to follow the successive steps by which St. Thomas comes to the determination of it through a series



of eight articles in the *Summa*.<sup>2</sup> The general question St. Thomas seeks to answer in these articles is how the soul, in its state of union with the body, understands corporeal things.

a) *The soul knows corporeal things through its intellect.*<sup>3</sup>—In the first article St. Thomas presents a general analysis of the Platonic theory of knowledge. Among other things, Plato sought to refute Heraclitus, who, believing that all knowledge was of sense, and all sensible things in a constant flux, had denied the possibility of certain and abiding truth in knowledge. It was to avoid the sensism and, to use a modern label for an old idea, the phenomenism of Heraclitus that Plato declared the unchanging and separate realities of another world the only possible objects of science properly speaking. The consequence was that intellectual knowledge had no connection with things perceived by sense. But, says St. Thomas, such a view is impossible on two counts: first, because it would rule out all science or certain knowledge of nature, that is, of mobile and material being; and secondly, it involves the absurd notion that to explain things that are manifest to us we should resort to things that are essentially different from them. Plato's error, remarks St. Thomas, is due to his failure to understand that things do not exist in the same way in the mind as in reality. In the mind they are universal and immaterial; in reality, particular and material.

b) *The soul does not know corporeal things through its own essence.*<sup>4</sup>—St. Thomas is resolute on this point, opposing all other suggestions. In other words, we do not know corporeal things simply in knowing ourselves, as God knows all things in His own essence. The natural philosophers of early antiquity had given a materialist twist to the principle that like is known by like; external fire, for example, being known by the fire of

<sup>2</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 84, aa. 1–8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 2.

which the soul is constituted, and so on in regard to air and water and the other elements. Here was a crude version, indeed, of the theory that like is known by like. But such an explanation cannot stand because, among other reasons, when things are known they exist in the soul, not materially, but immaterially. The truth is that God alone knows all things through His essence, *per essentiam*; lesser intellects, both human and angelic, know them only through a similitude or likeness, *per similitudinem*.

c) The soul does not know things through innate or infused ideas.<sup>5</sup>—It is conceivable that the species or similitudes which the soul must have in order to know things other than itself should have been implanted from the beginning as a natural endowment. Such a proposal, however, must also be rejected. If it were true, we ought to be always knowing these things actually, a supposition that is plainly not so. Plato's contention that the species or forms are always present in the soul but not always in act because of the body's obstruction, merely adds another difficulty. It would not be easy to explain why a union intended by nature (that of body and soul) should be a natural hindrance to an activity that is similarly grounded in nature, namely, the knowing of the species allegedly present by nature.

d) The soul does not know through species received from separate forms or intelligences.<sup>6</sup>—Here again it is the Platonic theory that comes in for criticism, this time, however, as amended by Avicenna. This Moslem philosopher felt that the notion of separate and subsistent forms could not be logically sustained. Instead, he said, the forms or species of things pre-exist in higher intelligences, from the first of which they are communicated to the second, and so on until they reach the last intelligence, called agent intellect. From the agent intellect they are introduced, at the proper moment, to the possible or

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 4.

knowing intellect of man. This granted, the difficulties relating to the separate existence of ideas are indeed done away with, but only at the expense of further difficulties. One of the main objections raised by St. Thomas against this revised version of Plato's theory is that it leaves no adequate reason for the union of body and soul. According to St. Thomas, the principal reason for the soul being united to a body is to receive through the body the sensible species or likenesses of things from which the intellect can derive the intelligible species that it must have to know. If we deny this, its principal function, to the body, there would seem to be no further reason for its existence at all.<sup>7</sup>

No e) *In what sense the soul knows things through the "eternal reasons" in God*.<sup>8</sup>—In the article dealing with this point St. Thomas declares himself on the Augustinian adaptation of Plato's doctrine. All the objections against the separate existence of ideas are nullified by one stroke, as it were, if with St. Augustine we place them in the mind of God. Avicenna, we saw, followed a comparable course, allocating them to subsistent intelligences. St. Thomas agrees with the Augustinian transposition of the ideas. But the question still remains whether, as St. Augustine suggests, we know things through these "reasons" or ideas in the mind of God, which are the eternal prototypes of all things actual and possible.

It is by making a necessary distinction that St. Thomas finds it possible to agree with St. Augustine without prejudice to his own position. To know something through or "in another," he says, can mean two things. It can mean to know it in another as in an object itself known. In this way the soul at present does not know things in the eternal reasons of God. "In another" can also mean "in a principle of knowledge," as we may say

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Text XII, "The Separated Soul's Knowledge": b) Theory of Avicenna, p. 280.

<sup>8</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 84, a. 5.



that we see what we see by the light of the sun. In this way the soul knows all things in the eternal reasons or ideas of God, because its intellectual light is a certain participated likeness of God's uncreated light, in which are contained the eternal reasons or ideas. With that, St. Thomas and St. Augustine are reconciled. But the basic Aristotelian and Thomistic premise stands: Before we can actually know we still need to derive our intelligible species from sensible things.

f) *Conclusion: Our intellectual knowledge is derived from sensible things.*<sup>9</sup>—Since both the Platonic theory and the sensism of Democritus run up against all sorts of irresolvable contradictions, the only logical course is the middle way, the *via media*, of Aristotle, in which sense knowledge is the basis and starting point for intellectual knowledge. All our intellectual knowledge begins with the senses. From this premise we must sooner or later reach the conclusion that the proper object of this knowledge is the nature or "quiddity" of sensible things.

We cannot here review in detail all that St. Thomas has to say on this topic in the articles summarized above, but the student would do well to examine them at greater length. Most rewarding to him would be, for example, the further study of the articles<sup>10</sup> in which St. Thomas, with characteristic insight, shows how intimately our two ways of knowing, sense and intellect, are related by pointing out that the intellect cannot know without turning to the phantasm and that any obstacle to sense causes a corresponding obstacle to intellect. It is only by attentive search and examination that one can appreciate the wealth of experience and the earnest reflection underlying St. Thomas' doctrine on the matter at hand. Above all, the student should not be deceived or deterred by first impressions. It would be a great mistake to make little of this or any other teaching of

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, aa. 6, 7, 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, aa. 7, 8.

St. Thomas and our former masters in general just because we find their style sometimes dry and elliptical, and their thought not always easy to follow.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Definition of the Proper Object of the Human Intellect

a) *The nature of this proper object.*—The immediately preceding analysis brought us to the conclusion that the proper object of the human intellect in its state of union with the body is the quiddity or nature existing in a corporeal thing:

*intellectus autem humani qui est conjunctum corpori proprium objectum est quidditas, sive natura, in materia corporali existens.*<sup>12</sup>

This doctrine is repeated in countless places in the writings of St. Thomas. In the Commentary on *De Anima*, for example, we find him saying that “the proper object of the intellect is the quiddity of a thing, but this quiddity is not separate from things, as the Platonists supposed.”<sup>13</sup> A further example is the following one from the *Summa*: “The object of our intellect in its present state is the quiddity of a material thing.”<sup>14</sup>

Since terms like “quiddity” and “nature” have various connotations in the vernacular, one of our first tasks is to clear up the meaning they have in the present context. Etymologically, quiddity (Latin: *quidditas*) denotes the idea we have in mind when we reply to the question, what is it? or, simply, what? (Latin: *quid*). This idea is the quiddity or *quidditas*. The quiddity, then, means the inner nature of a thing, its essence, or that by which it is the sort of thing it is. The senses, it will be remembered, can perceive only the external accidents of a

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Text VI, “The Human Intellect Is an Abstractive Faculty,” p. 253.

<sup>12</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 84, a. 7.

<sup>13</sup> In III *De Anima*, lect. 8, no. 717.

<sup>14</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 85, a. 8.

thing, but the intellect can reach to its very being or nature. It is true, of course, and worth noting, that the intellect can also conceive the properties and accidents and appearances of things as essences or essentially, that is, in the manner of quiddities. But the immediate and primary function of the intellect is to apprehend the essences of things.

Furthermore, the quiddity that constitutes the proper object of the human intellect is the abstract nature of a thing, which means the nature considered apart from all those conditions by which it exists as singular and individual. As St. Thomas notes, it is proper to the human intellect to "know a form existing individually in corporeal matter, but not as existing in this individual matter. But to know what is in individual matter, not as existing in such a matter, is to abstract the form from the individual matter which is represented by the phantasms."<sup>15</sup>

b) Comparison with the proper object of other intellects.—Considerable light is shed on this matter by comparing the proper object of the human intellect with that of other faculties of knowledge, whether sensory or spiritual. St. Thomas does so in more than one place.<sup>16</sup>

At the lowest level is sense, a faculty bound to a bodily organ. Its proper object is the form as existing in corporeal matter: "forma prout in materia corporali existit."

Next in order is the human intellect, a faculty not bound to any bodily organ. Its object, we have said, is the form existing in corporeal matter, but not as it exists in such matter: "forma in materia quidem corporali individualiter existens, non tamen prout est in tali materia."

Higher still is the angelic intellect, which is neither bound to a bodily organ nor in any way dependent on corporeal matter. Its proper object, then, is a form that not only is not considered as existing in individual matter, but does not exist in matter at all: "forma sine materia subsistens."

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 12, a. 4; q. 85, a. 1.



Far above these and highest of all is the divine intellect, which is identical with God's subsistent being itself, and to which alone this very being is the proper object: "cognoscere ipsum esse subsistens est connaturale soli intellectui divino."

## II. THE ADEQUATE OBJECT OF THE HUMAN INTELLECT

If our intellect were strictly limited to its proper object, all we could know would be the essence of material things, even as all that sight can see is colored surface. But since the soul is spiritual in nature, its range of knowledge is not so limited. Experience bears out the fact that we do have some knowledge of things other than the proper object of the intellect. We do know things in the singular, and we can think and theorize about higher realities, such as God and the angels. Evidently, the intellect's capacity for knowledge is not exhausted by its proper object. Hence, there is sufficient ground for admitting the already-mentioned adequate object, which is more comprehensive, including everything the intellect can know in any way whatever.

a) The adequate object of the human intellect is being in its entirety: all being.—The proof of this thesis rests with metaphysics, and need not be gone into here except to say that the evidence for it comes, primarily, from the analysis of judgment. When we examine the judgment we find that the first notion the intellect forms of things is existence. "This thing that I perceive, is." Such is the initial observation of the intellect.

But the being apprehended by the intellect is not limited to any particular kind. It embodies all being and everything that can be conceived in the manner of being. Included, therefore, are both real being and beings of reason, actual and possible being, natural and supernatural being. All these modes of being lie within the range of the human intellect, as well as of every other, because the intellect as such is the faculty of being.

b) Nevertheless, what is contained in the proper object is

not apprehended in the same manner by the intellect as what lies beyond.—Here we encounter something of a difficulty. What, we ask, is the good of affirming a special object in regard to our intellect when, in fact, it is capable of going beyond this object? The answer is that only the quiddity of sensible things is apprehended directly and in its specific nature. Other things are apprehended only secondarily, that is, indirectly or through the medium of the proper object. If, like the singular, they are grasped in conjunction with the proper object, we say they are known indirectly; if, like transcendent or spiritual realities, they are not conjoined to the proper object, they are known comparatively or by analogy.

Accordingly, even though all being is accessible to the human intellect, its activity is specified in the first instance by the knowledge of material essences. Immaterial beings must be conceived by analogy with the concepts we form of bodily beings. Doubtless, this latter circumstance puts our intellect at a certain disadvantage. What it means, as St. Thomas likes to repeat, is that the human intellect occupies the lowest rank in the scale of intellect.

c) *Corollary: the unity of the intellectual faculty.*—Because its scope is unlimited, the intellect, unlike sense, is not divided into several potencies. Its notion of being includes and commands all possible distinctions of object. If, nevertheless, we speak of certain distinctions in regard to the intellect, these terms do not imply a real diversity of potencies.

Thus, *reason* (discursive intellect) is not really distinct from *intellect* (intuitive intellect). The former is to the latter as movement to rest. Both operations are acts of the same potency.<sup>17</sup>

Also, the *practical intellect* (the faculty governing practical life or action) is not really distinct from the *speculative intellect* (the faculty of pure knowledge, or knowledge for its own sake). This

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 79, a. 8.

is no more than an accidental distinction; for, it is accidental to the object apprehended by the intellect to be translated into action. But what is accidentally related to the object of a potency is not sufficient ground for diversifying the potency.<sup>18</sup>

It is on this same principle that St. Thomas does not hold intellectual memory to be really distinct from intellect proper. The formality of past as past (*ratio praeteriti*), the distinctive mark of memory, is an accidental qualification as far as the object of the intellect is concerned. As for the conservation and reproduction of species, which are also conditions of memory, St. Thomas takes the view that the intellect as a single potency can account for these additional functions.<sup>19</sup>

The only real distinction in this connection is that of active and passive intellect, a distinction, however, not based on the object, but on a difference of disposition in the potency. The active principle in the production of the intelligible species is the agent intellect; it actualizes the possible or knowing intellect, which, from this point of view, is passive.<sup>20</sup>

### III. THE HUMAN INTELLECT AND THE VISION OF GOD

#### 1. Presentation of the Problem

a) Is it possible to see God?—All being, we have said, is accessible to the human intellect. But does this mean that it can have a direct and immediate knowledge of the divine being? Any obstacle to such knowledge certainly would not be on the side of God, since the divine being is perfectly in act and hence utterly intelligible. The limitation, if any, must lie in our intellect. Between every potency and its object must exist a certain proportion; but in the present case the object is un-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, a. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, a. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, a. 7.



questionably infinite, and the potency a created entity and therefore manifestly finite. St. Thomas states the difficulty in the form of an objection. "There must be some proportion," so goes the argument, "between the knower and the known, since the known is the perfection of the knower. But no proportion exists between the created intellect and God; for there is an infinite distance between them. Therefore the created intel-  
lect cannot see the essence of God."<sup>21</sup>

In principle, to be sure, there is no reason why a finite intellect should not be able to acquire some measure of knowl-  
edge about God's essence by reasoning from created effects to their cause; but what would seem to be altogether beyond the capacity of such an intellect is that it should have an immediate and direct apprehension of this essence, so as to see God face  
to face, as the phrase has it. Yet the Christian faith unequivocally declares that such a vision is the very end and purpose of human life. Our problem, therefore, centers around the possi-  
bility of seeing the divine essence, a problem that is primarily  
theological but also concerns the philosopher, at least to the  
extent of determining the natural limitations of the human  
intellect. What we are after, in other words, is whether human  
reason itself can establish the possibility affirmed by faith?  
Such is the precise point in question.

b) *The teaching of St. Thomas.*—The Angelic Doctor has stated his teaching on the matter in several famous passages. In these texts he bases the argument for the possibility of such a vision on our having a natural desire to see God in His es-  
sence.<sup>22</sup> In substance, his reasoning is as follows. Man, he says, has a natural desire to know the cause when he knows the effect; and since the intellect as such is made to know the essence of things, this desire includes the knowledge of the essence of

<sup>21</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 12, a. 1, obj. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Contra Gentiles*, III, 25 ff.; *Compendium theol.*, cc. 104–105; *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 12, a. 1; Ia IIae, q. 3, a. 8.

the cause. But if all we could know of God were His existence, inferred from His effects, our natural desire to know and see Him directly as cause would be void. A natural desire, however, cannot be void; hence, our intellect must be fundamentally capable of seeing God. St. Thomas puts the core of the argument this way:

"There resides in every man a natural desire to know the cause of any effect which he sees; and thence arises wonder in man. But if the intellect of the rational creature could not reach so far as to the first cause of things, the natural desire would remain void."<sup>23</sup>

Superficially considered, this and similar passages may lead one to think that for St. Thomas the vision of God's essence is not only possible to the created intellect but even connatural, corresponding to a real and positive inclination of our being, as if to say that we can see God by our own natural powers. Such an interpretation, however, runs squarely into the most grave difficulties. Besides the preceding objection regarding the infinite disproportion between the object and the potency, there are the contrary affirmations of faith, which leave no doubt in the matter. Faith teaches that our elevation to the supernatural and, therefore, to the beatific vision is the work, not of nature, but of grace. Only the divine intellect is, of itself, naturally proportioned to the self-subsistent being of God. For this reason we also find in St. Thomas certain passages which, like the following one, seem to run counter to the quotation of a moment ago:

"To know self-subsistent being is natural to the divine intellect alone; and this is beyond the natural power of any created intellect. . . . Therefore the created intellect cannot see the

<sup>23</sup> "Inest enim homini naturale desiderium cognoscendi causam, cum intuetur effectus; et ex hoc admiratio in hominibus consurgit. Si igitur intellectus rationalis creaturae pertingere non possit ad primam causam rerum, remanebit inane desiderium naturae" (*Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 12, a. 1).

essence of God, unless God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it.”<sup>24</sup>

The argument from natural desire, then, needs to be carefully scrutinized for its exact meaning.

## 2. *The Meaning of Natural Desire to See God*<sup>25</sup>

a) *The Scotist interpretation.*—According to some of the theologians, among whom Scotus is regarded as the leading figure, the vision of God is in some manner a positive requirement of our nature. They admit that by nature alone we do not have the means of attaining this goal, and so grace is necessary. In spite of the necessity of grace, however, they believe that we have truly an innate and natural, although inefficacious, inclination toward the supernatural. Whatever one may think of such a conception, there can be no doubt that it is foreign to the mind of St. Thomas, who, in appealing to natural desire for his argument, never takes it to mean an inclination of nature or an innate appetite. What, in effect, is an innate appetite? It is nothing less than the manifestation or expression of the real capacities of any given nature. To propose, then, that we have an innate appetite for the vision of God amounts to saying that the vision of God is connatural to us. And we do not escape this impossible pass with the rejoinder that the means to the end in view are of grace, though the end itself of nature—we only create more contradiction.

<sup>24</sup> “Relinquitur ergo quod cognoscere ipsum esse divinum sit connaturale soli intellectui divino, et quod sit supra facultatem naturalem cujuslibet intellectui creati. . . . Non igitur potest intellectus creatus Deum per essentiam videre, nisi in quantum Deus per suam gratiam se intellectui creato conjungit, ut intelligibile ab ipso” (*Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 12, a. 4).

<sup>25</sup> On this question the student may consult A. Gardeil, O.P., *La structure de l'âme et l'expérience mystique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1927), I, 268–348. Among more recent English works dealing with the same problem are W. R. O'Connor, *The Eternal Quest* (New York, etc.: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947) and, taking a somewhat opposite view, R. P. Sullivan, O.P., *Man's Thirst for Good* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1952).



b) *The correct view of natural desire.*—As against the preceding interpretation, we must first of all acknowledge that the desire in question is an *elicited* desire; which means that it is not an unconscious tendency flowing immediately from nature, but an inclination that is accessible to consciousness, arising as it does in the wake of a determined act of knowledge or apprehension. With reference to the case at hand, after I have come to understand that God is the cause of all the things about me, I *experience* the desire to see this cause, which is God, and not only as cause but in His very nature and essence. At this point, however, a question is in order. If, as we have said, this desire is reducible to a fact of conscious experience, what ground is there for saying that it is also *natural*. Here, to be frank, lies the heart of the problem, and many different explanations have been proposed. The best answer, we believe, is the one set forth some years ago by Father A. Gardeil, O.P.<sup>26</sup>

Consider, first of all, the manner in which our desire tends toward the supreme good or happiness. There is one thing above all others which it is impossible not to want, and that is to be happy. The desire for happiness, which is to say for the good considered universally, imposes itself on us in an absolute manner. This inclination which cannot be denied is simply the natural and innate appetite of the will for the good, that is, for the attainment of our ultimate end. What we want to know is whether it is possible to desire to see God on the strength of such an inclination; whether, in other words, this natural inclination actually includes a desire to see God. The answer is no, because, granting that the vision of God is in fact our happiness, we are not naturally, that is, necessarily persuaded of it. Not a few men, it would seem, are utterly insensible of or indifferent to this end that is God. Consequently, the desire for God as our ultimate end is a conditional one, meaning that such an end is desirable to the extent that

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 291 ff.

it appears to me to be incorporated in the universal good, which alone necessarily moves my will. Let us hasten to add—and this is the crucial point—that for one who reasons correctly this necessary connection between God and the universal good follows, as it were, naturally.

The vision of God, therefore, must be classified with those goods that St. Thomas clearly defines as particular, such as the various objects of my other faculties. These objects, says St. Thomas, are included in the object of the will in the manner of particular goods; they are willed naturally, by a necessity that is not absolute but conditional, befitting man's nature.<sup>27</sup> The desire corresponding to this vision, then, will be natural, not in the manner of an innate inclination or "pull" of nature, but because it arises naturally as man's reasoned understanding develops, provided this development be normal and not perverted. Such a desire, St. Thomas believes, cannot be void and without foundation. To conclude, then, the possibility of the beatific vision discloses itself, not indeed as something self-evident, yet as truly befitting our nature.

c) *The obediential capacity for the supernatural.*—The consideration of the possibility of the beatific vision brings us to what St. Thomas and theologians generally call the obediential capacity for the supernatural. If our nature can be so elevated as to see God, it must somehow have a radical capacity or potentiality for this vision. But we know that of itself it is not actively or efficaciously inclined toward this supernatural end. Only God by a gratuitous intervention of grace can make the desire efficacious, and the potentiality an actuality. Obediential capacity, therefore, is a totally passive disposition; it designates nothing more than the complete submissiveness of every creature to God, submissiveness that knows no bounds except the bounds of contradiction. Here, to be sure, we touch on the

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia IIae, q. 10, a. 1: "Conveniunt volenti secundum suam naturam."

highest reaches of our intellect; and since the matter has to do above all with grace, we may properly leave its further discussion to the theologian.

3. *Conclusion: Faculty of Being or Faculty of the Divine?*

To the question whether the created intellect can see God we answered in the affirmative. Such an intellect is really capable of the vision of God. But our answer carried a restriction. This capacity of the created intellect is nothing more than the purely passive possibility it has of being elevated, at God's pleasure, to such a vision. With these particulars in mind we turn for a moment to a point raised some years ago in a book that attracted no small attention, namely, whether the human intellect is the faculty of being or the faculty of the divine.<sup>28</sup> In this book the author, Father Rousselot, S.J., took the view that the intellect is the faculty of being because it is the faculty of the divine.

Such a formulation, though elegantly put, is not without ambiguity; indeed, as interpreted by its author it can only lead to confusion. Like every potency, the human intellect is defined by its proper object, or, if we consider it as an analogical participation of intellect per se, by its adequate object. It is, accordingly, the faculty of the being of the material quiddity, or, viewing it from its adequate object, the faculty of being considered in its entirety. But the divine essence is not included in either of these objects in such wise as to be determined or defined by them; and so it is not correct to say that the human intellect is formally the faculty of the divine. God is not directly apprehended by it, but at second hand, as it were, through analogy with creatures and as the inferred cause of being. One

<sup>28</sup> P. Rousselot, S.J., *L'intellectualisme de saint Thomas*, 3rd ed. (Paris: G. Beauchesne et Fils, 1936); English trans. from the 2nd French edition by James E. O'Mahony, O.M. Cap. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935).





## I. THE AGENT INTELLECT AND THE ABSTRACTION OF THE INTELLIGIBLE SPECIES

### 1. *Philosophical Approach to the Problem*

It is a basic principle of Aristotelian psychology that at its origin the human intellect is in pure potency with respect to the intelligible object; we have, in other words, no innate ideas. Consequently, before the intellect can know, it must receive its object. But where is this object to come from? Certainly not from a transcendent world of separate ideas or higher intelligences. It need hardly be further explained that this hypothesis lacks all foundation in fact and runs counter to experience. Therefore, we can only conclude that our ideas are somehow derived from sense knowledge. But here arises the difficulty already referred to. How can material objects impress themselves on a purely spiritual faculty? In sense perception the reception of such objects is explained by the senses, through their organ, remaining continuous with the world of corporeal things. It is not logical, however, to suppose that a spiritual faculty, the intellect, should similarly depend on realities of an order inferior to it. Briefly, material things are not intelligible in act, only in potency. Intellectual knowledge, on the other hand, being an act of the intellect, has to do with an intelligible in act. *Parrr*

This difficulty is not insurmountable; in fact, to state it is already to suggest the solution. If sensible things are not intelligible in act, and if, moreover, our ideas are neither innate nor infused from a higher world of separate intelligences, we must look to the intellect itself for the clue to the problem. Remembering that the object as delivered by the senses lacks the necessary degree of immateriality to actualize the intellect, we have but to propose the existence, within the intellect itself, of an active power whose role and capacity it is to raise

the object to the intelligible level. Should it be found that this is actually how matters stand, our problem is solved, at least in principle. St. Thomas, as a matter of fact, puts the case for the agent intellect just as we have outlined it. Thus, in the *Summa* he writes:

Since Aristotle did not allow that forms of natural things exist apart from matter, and as forms existing in matter are not actually intelligible, it follows that the natures or forms of the sensible things which we understand are not actually intelligible. . . . We must therefore assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by the abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity for an active intellect.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. *The Problem in Historical Retrospect*

In itself the case for the agent intellect is relatively simple; but historically speaking its development throughout the Aristotelian tradition was far from even, being turned and twisted to no end. The reason for this situation lay in those very texts of Aristotle from which the doctrine is drawn. These passages are unfortunately marked by certain ambiguities that were destined to give rise to almost endless controversies. Since, moreover, St. Thomas is continually referring to these disagreements, we ought to know something of their source and growth.

a) *The text of Aristotle and its difficulties.*—Aristotle takes up the question of the intellect in the fourth chapter of Book III of *De Anima*. In the next chapter, without any advance

<sup>20</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 79, a. 3. The Latin of the last half of the quotation reads as follows: "Oportebat igitur ponere aliquam virtutem ex parte intellectus, quae faceret intelligibilia in actu per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus. Et haec est necessitas ponendi intellectum agentem."

See also Text VII A, "The Existence of the Agent Intellect," p. 260.



notice, he proceeds to speak of two different kinds of intellect, basing his remarks on a comparison with things in the material world. As in all nature, so he argues, we find, first, something that is as matter in every genus and something that is as cause and agent, so in the soul there is both the intellect that is comparable to matter because it becomes all intelligible objects, and the intellect that makes all. Aristotle then compares this second intellect to light, for it is through light that colors, which are only potentially visible in the object, become actually visible. Next, he enumerates the properties of this active intellect, saying it is separable, unmixed, and impassible, that is, incapable of being acted on, since it is in act by nature. Finally, in a passage that is especially obscure, he seemingly says that the active intellect alone is immortal and eternal, the passive intellect being corruptible, so that after death there can be no remembrance regarding this present life.<sup>30</sup>

So much for this crucial chapter in Aristotle. Two points in particular were to become focuses of sharp controversy. The first had to do with the term "separable." In what sense should the active intellect be declared separate? Merely in the sense that it is a spiritual power, numerically multiplied with and existing in each individual (the interpretation of St. Thomas); or so far as to make it a transcendent and subsistent principle, one and the same for all individuals (the more common interpretation)?

The second point bore on the immortality of the soul. If the passive intellect of each individual is corruptible, and the agent intellect a transcendent principle, one and the same for all, does it not follow that there is no individual immortality? Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes did in fact profess this conclusion.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *De Anima*, III, 5.

<sup>31</sup> However, in an article, "Averroes and Immortality," *The New Scholasticism* (XXVIII, Oct. 1954), Beatrice H. Zedler takes a somewhat different

Furthermore, as if these divergent views regarding the active intellect had not been enough, the problem in general was further complicated by differences of opinion about the possible intellect. Some also held this to be corruptible, but others incorruptible. On the latter hypothesis, the same question arose: Was it, too, separate or not?

b) *The various interpretations confronting St. Thomas.*—Among the ancient commentators of Aristotle, the theory of a separate agent intellect appears in (Alexander of Aphrodisias (2nd cent. A.D.), who proposed a threefold classification of intellect. One he called material, which was probably corruptible; another was intellect in the manner of a “habitus,” which determined the former; the third was the agent intellect, immaterial and separate, having all the earmarks of a deity.

In general, the Arabian Aristotelians, Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, who were much closer in time to St. Thomas and the more immediate targets of his criticism, also adopted the theory of a separate agent intellect, existing apart from and above individual human beings. According to Avicenna, moreover, this intellect was only the lowest in a hierarchy of intelligences. From it both material things received their substantial forms and the soul the intelligible species by which it knows

view of Averroes' stand regarding the personal immortality of the human soul, believing that a distinction must be made between what he said *in principle* and what he gives evidence of having adhered to *in fact*. In principle it may be granted that he should perhaps have denied personal immortality, since the unicity of intellect necessarily involves the unicity of soul if one regards intellect and soul as inseparable, as did the Medievals; yet Averroes also teaches that each man will live after death. Hence, the intellect would be one, but the souls of men many: a position that is difficult to reconcile. Writes Dr. Zedler: “Medieval Christians have attributed to Averroes a position that he *should* perhaps have had. . . . Logically, they thought, he should have denied the doctrine of personal immortality. Such a denial might well have been more consistent with his total position than an acceptance of the possibility of the doctrine. But Averroes may not have been the logical well-integrated thinker he was believed to have been” (*ibid.*, p. 453).—Translator's note.

such things. May we note, however, that St. Thomas reserved his sharpest attack for Averroes, since his doctrine that the possible as well as the agent intellect was separate posed the greatest threat of all to the immortality of the human soul.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. The Nature of the Agent Intellect

a) *The agent intellect exists as a real faculty in the soul.*—In opposition to most of the aforesaid commentators of Aristotle, St. Thomas unequivocally affirms that the agent intellect exists as something real in every human soul: *est aliquid animae*.<sup>33</sup> His reasons are as simple as they are to the point. It is a general principle that universal and transcendent causes do not act on lower beings without the concurrence of causes that are intrinsic and proper to these beings. If, then, there is a (separate and transcendent agent intellect, it still requires the cooperation of a secondary faculty existing in the soul. Another and perhaps even more decisive reason is that experience testifies that we do in fact abstract from sensible things the species through which intellectual knowledge arises. We could not, however, ascribe an action to the soul or any other subject if it did not proceed from the subject through some form or principle inherent in it. To quote the words of St. Thomas: “We know this by experience, since we perceive that we abstract universal forms from their particular conditions, which is to make them actually intelligible. Now, no action belongs to anything except through some principle formally inherent therein.”<sup>34</sup>

Assuming this doctrine to be correct, may we still speak

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Text VII B, “The Agent Intellect Is Neither Separate Nor One and the Same for All,” p. 262.

<sup>33</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 79, a. 4.

<sup>34</sup> “Et hoc experimento cognoscimus, dum percipimus nos abstrahere formas universales a conditionibus particularibus, quod est facere actu intelligibilia. Nulla autem actio convenit alicui rei, nisi per aliquod principium formaliter ei inhaerens” (*ibid.*).



of a separate agent intellect? Yes, says St. Thomas, provided we take it to mean none other than God Himself, who creates and enlightens the soul. In his own words again: "The separate intellect, according to the teaching of our faith, is God Himself, who is the soul's Creator. . . . Wherefore the human soul derives its intellectual light from Him, according to Ps. 4, 7, 'The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us.'" <sup>35</sup> As for the agent intellect in the proper sense, that exists in the soul, of which it is a special faculty, really distinct from intellect considered in its receptive function, which is to say, really distinct from the passive intellect.

b) *The actuality of the agent intellect.*—This is a point that calls for some clarification. The agent intellect, it is said, is a faculty that is always in act. In what sense is this true? Or, to put the matter somewhat differently, it is not immediately evident how in the same intellect and at the same time there can be one faculty in potency and another in act with respect to the same intelligible objects. To this query St. Thomas replies that the passivity of the one faculty and the actuality of the other are not considered from the same point of view.<sup>36</sup> The passive intellect is in potency with respect to the determinations or constituent principles and properties of the external things to be known by it, whereas the agent intellect is said to be in act by reason of being immaterial and hence capable of giving immaterial or actually intelligible status to an object that in itself is only potentially intelligible. The agent intellect, remarks St. Thomas, "is appointed to be in act with respect to intelligible objects inasmuch as it is an active and immaterial power, capable of making other things

<sup>35</sup> "Sed intellectus separatus, secundum nostrae fidei documenta, est ipse Deus, qui est creator animae, . . . Unde ab ipso anima humana lumen intellectuale participat, secundum illud Psalmi iv, 'Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine'" (*ibid.*).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *In III De Anima*, lect. 10, no. 737 and *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 79, a. 4 ad 4.

like itself, namely, immaterial. In this way, things that are potentially intelligible, it makes actually intelligible.”<sup>37</sup> To say, then, that the agent intellect is always in act does not mean that at every moment it is causing potentially intelligible objects to be actually intelligible, but that it can perform this function without itself having to be reduced to act.

#### 4. The Preparation of Sense Data for Abstraction

As a rule St. Thomas uses the term *phantasmata* to designate that element in sense knowledge which serves as the starting point for the activity of the agent intellect. Since in one way or another the *phantasmata* or phantasms play an important role in all our knowledge, we ought to be very clear about the meaning of the term.

a) Psychologically speaking, phantasms may be described as images, provided we keep in mind that both the external and internal senses in general contribute to their formation. Phantasms, therefore, are not to be regarded as mere replicas of isolated sensations, but as the result of a highly complex process of sensory elaboration. St. Thomas himself seems to agree that before intellectual knowledge can take place, there must precede on the sense level some sort of integration and unification of sense data, so that the resultant percept already bears a certain mark of generality and constitutes a kind of intermediary between the individual object directly perceived by sense and the true universal idea attainable by intellect only.<sup>38</sup> Too often we find Thomistic authors depicting the successive steps of the process of knowledge in terms so oversimplified as to be misleading. Be that as it may, the student ought to understand very clearly, even as the real masters in Thomism

<sup>37</sup> “Comparatur igitur ut actus respectu intelligibilium, in quantum est quaedam virtus immaterialis activa, potens alia similia sibi facere, scilicet immaterialia. Et per hunc modum ea quae sunt intelligibilia in potentia facit intelligibilia in actu” (*In III De Anima*, lect. 10, no. 739).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *In I Metaph.*, lect. 1 and *In II Post. Anal.*, lect. 20.

have always understood, that in the concrete the birth of knowledge is a very complex affair indeed.

b) With respect to their knowable content, phantasms are said to be potentially intelligible or to contain the intelligible object in potency. This does not mean, however, that the form or essence of the external thing which the phantasm represents, is not really and specifically present in it. On the contrary, the phantasm truly holds the essence of the thing that is to become known through its medium; otherwise, how could it convey this essence to the intellect? Accordingly, to say that phantasms are potentially intelligible means that they are in potency with respect to the intelligible or intentional mode of existence which the essence must assume to be actually known by the intellect. Consequently, the actuation or determination of the intelligible object, of which we shall have to speak in a moment, does not refer to the formal or specific determination of the thing coming from the outside, but to the determination of its intentional or representative being in the mind.

### 5. *The Action of the Agent Intellect*

It is the function of the agent intellect to make actually intelligible what is potentially intelligible in the image or phantasm, and in so doing, to prepare a spiritual likeness of the object for the passive intellect. Just how are we to understand this work of the agent intellect, which is a purely spiritual activity and must therefore be apprehended in round-about fashion. Certain comparisons have become standard repertory as aids to a better comprehension of the activity in question.

a) *The analogy of light.*—Aristotle himself proposes this comparison, showing how the role of light in regard to color is similar to the role of the agent intellect in respect of the phantasm. As color, which is the object of sight, becomes actually visible only through the illuminating agency of light,



so the intelligible object, contained potentially in the image, becomes actually intelligible only when illumined by the agent intellect.

One of the merits of this comparison is its apt illustration that the sensible object is not actually intelligible in itself, a clear indication that intellectual knowledge requires an active or actualizing principle distinct from the object. The comparison also suggests some of the characteristic qualities of the activity of this principle. For example, the fact that light itself is colorless and does not, strictly speaking, produce the real colors of the object, calls to mind the fact that the agent intellect does not produce any formal or specific determination in the object; does not, in other words, alter the object as to its nature. Also, the approximate spirituality of light—so the ancients understood it—is reminiscent of the real spirituality that marks the activity of the agent intellect.

On the other hand, one of the shortcomings of this comparison is that it leaves unexplained how the possible intellect itself is actuated. Beyond this, it lends itself to the misconception that the object exists as actually intelligible outside of the intellect proper, confronting it, so to speak, as something to be contemplated but apart from it, when, in fact, there can be no intelligible object in act except within the receptive faculty itself, namely, the passive intellect.

b) *The metaphor "abstraction."*—In Aristotelian philosophy the activity of the agent intellect is constantly referred to as "abstraction." It is said that this faculty abstracts the intelligible object or species from the phantasm, or that it divests the sensible species of the material conditions that cause it to be singular and individual. Here, obviously, the terms "abstraction" and "divestment" are to be taken metaphorically. What they are intended to represent is, not so much the nature of the activity of the agent intellect, but the effect produced by it on the object.

This comparison, like the other one, fails to bring out a very important aspect of the operation of the agent intellect, namely, that this activity results in the passive intellect itself being actually informed or determined by the object. Both comparisons leave the impression that the intelligible object is something inert, confronting, in lifeless fashion, the faculty of knowledge. The truth, however, is that the object acts in a real manner on the passive intellect. How, then, does it do so; in other words, what is the nature of the causality it exercises on this faculty?

c) *The bilateral and concurrent causality of agent intellect and species.*—To begin with, it should be clear that taken separately neither the agent intellect nor the phantasm can act on the passive or possible intellect. (The terms “passive” and “possible” intellect, it should be apparent by now, are interchangeable.) The agent intellect alone cannot do so because it is formally undetermined; that is, it contains neither actually nor potentially any species. The phantasm alone cannot do so because with respect to the intelligible order it is only in potency and not in act. Therefore, agent intellect and phantasm must somehow act together in order to determine or inform the passive intellect. Two explanations of this concurrent causality have been suggested.

According to one interpretation, in the impression of the species on the passive intellect the phantasm intervenes as a material cause, whereas the agent intellect exercises a sort of formal causality. Among other things, this view of the matter carries the erroneous implication that the phantasm serves as subject to the activity in question, when, in reality, it is the possible intellect that plays this role.

Consequently, we are better advised to follow the explanation of John of St. Thomas, who regards the phantasm as an instrumental cause in the production of the intelligible species, moved by and subordinated to the principal cause, the agent

intellect.<sup>39</sup> In this way, both factors have a part in the determination of the species, each in its own order: the phantasm in the order of essence or nature, by being responsible for the agent intellect producing, not any sort of species, but a species or likeness of the particular object represented by the phantasm; and the agent intellect in the order of intelligible being, by rendering the object actually intelligible. Moreover, the causal activity of the phantasm serves the causal activity of the agent intellect, being, as already mentioned, subordinated to the latter as to a principal cause. St. Thomas himself seems to suggest this line of interpretation.<sup>40</sup> Following is the text in which he addresses himself most formally and most precisely to the point:

In the reception through which the possible intellect receives species from phantasms, the phantasms act as instrumental and secondary agents. The agent intellect acts as the principal and first agent. Therefore, the effect of the action is received in the possible intellect according to the condition of both, and not according to the condition of either one alone. Therefore, the possible intellect receives forms whose actual intelligibility is due to the power of the agent intellect, but whose determinate likeness to things is due to cognition of the phantasms. These actually intelligible forms do not, of themselves, exist either in the imagination or the agent intellect, but only in the possible intellect.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, just to make sure of it, we want to point out that the activity of the agent intellect is not at all a conscious process. We may be conscious of the image, and at the end of the process of abstraction we know the intelligible object, but the how of this passage from sensory awareness to intellectual comprehension can be explained only on a posteriori grounds,

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, Pars IV, q. 10, a. 2, *Secunda Difficultas*, "Dicendum nihilominus."

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *De Verit.*, q. 10, a. 6 ad 1, 7, 8; *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 85, a. 1 ad 3, 4.

<sup>41</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 10, a. 6 ad 7.



from effect to cause. We have no immediate experience of it. To be sure, this manner of approach is perfectly legitimate, not only here but in countless other matters. Furthermore, as compared with the corresponding operation by which the sensible species is formed, the abstraction of the intelligible species appears to be a function in which the faculty concerned, the intellect, is more actively engaged than the faculty of sense in the formation of its species; for, the elevation of the object to the level of intelligible being is entirely the work of the intellect rather than the phantasm or the object itself. In both instances, however, that is, both in the formation of the sensible and the intelligible species, the formal determination of the perceived object results from the action of something exterior to the knowing faculty.<sup>42</sup>

## II. THE POSSIBLE INTELLECT AND THE RECEPTION OF THE SPECIES

Strictly speaking, the agent intellect is not a faculty that knows. Rather, the "passive" or "possible" intellect—the two terms, to repeat, are interchangeable—is the faculty that knows intellectually, and to this intellect we now turn our attention. We shall see (a) first, that in regard to intelligible objects the passive intellect is in pure potency; (b) secondly, that before it can be in act it must be informed by an intelligible species; (c) next, the precise role of the species in the act of knowledge; and (d) lastly, how the species is linked and corresponds to the external thing.

a) *The possible intellect is a passive potency*.—As we had earlier occasion to remark in connection with sense perception, the principle that our faculties of knowledge are passive potencies governs the whole of Aristotelian psychology. Now, however, we must study it more closely for a better understanding of its real meaning, particularly as it applies to the intellect.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Text VI, "The Human Intellect Is an Abstractive Faculty," p. 253.

St. Thomas points out that in regard to the intellect the principle in question follows from the nature of the object of this faculty. The object of the intellect is universal being, which is infinite. If, then, our intellect were naturally in act in regard to its object, it, too, would be infinite, a contention that is clearly inadmissible, since the divine intellect alone is infinite. Still, the human intellect is a spiritual reality. How, precisely, can something spiritual be acted on (*pati*)? Not in the same way, obviously, as material things. St. Thomas explains that the passivity affirmed of the intellect does not imply that as a receiving subject it undergoes any deterioration or dispossession in its natural properties. In the present instance, therefore, to be passive means simply that through the influence of an agent the subject passes from potency to act without being deprived of any previous quality. In other words, it denotes nothing more than that the subject receives or acquires the act in regard to which it was in potency. Thus understood, passion (*pati*) is a perfection.<sup>43</sup>

Commentators have added, by way of further elucidation, that in the reception of the intelligible species the intellect is passive from two different points of view.<sup>44</sup> First, it possesses a so-called material, that is, natural or entitative passivity, since the species, which is a real accident, must preliminarily inform the intellect in the entitative order, in much the way that any substantial or accidental form of the physical order informs a real subject. Secondly, the intellect has an immaterial or intentional passivity, inasmuch as the object that is to be known must also perfect the knowing faculty in the objective or intentional order, which is the order of knowledge. Needless to say, it is this second passivity that is peculiar to knowledge.

b) *The reception of the species.*—Since the knowing in-

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 79, a. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Cajetan, *Comment. In Iam Part.*, q. 79, a. 2, nos. xvi–xx; John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, Pars IV, q. 6, a. 3.

tellec[t] is a passive potency, it must be reduced to act. This actualization, as we know, is brought about by the conjoint operation of the agent intellect and the phantasm, the one acting as principal, the other as instrumental cause. The first effect of this combined action is to modify the knowing faculty entitatively by producing in it a real accidental determination, which is the species considered entitatively. Besides this, there has to be a second determination, one of the intentional order, the effect of which is to actualize the intellect with respect to its intentional potency. Only then, strictly speaking, can the act of knowledge take place. Once the intellect is actualized by the species in both orders, entitative and intentional, it itself elicits the act of knowledge, and in this respect it is not passive but active.

The second, that is, intentional determination or information may or may not follow on the first, the entitative. When, for example, the intellect ceases to think about an object, the latter is no longer intelligibly or intentionally present; nevertheless, it retains its entitative presence in the manner of a "habitus." On the strength of this abiding entitative presence, the intellect can subsequently elicit the same act of knowledge whenever it again receives the corresponding intentional determination or information. Here, in the entitative survival of the species, lies the explanation for the possibility of passing repeatedly from the latent or un-thought idea to the actually-thought idea; which, in a word, is the meaning of intellectual memory.

c) *The role of the species in the act of the intellect.*—We have already noted that as soon as the possible intellect is informed by the species, it is ready to move from potency to act. This transition is brought about by the activity of the faculty itself once it is objectively, that is, intentionally determined or disposed to its act by the species. Like every action, the act of the intellect presupposes a potency and a form. In the case



at hand, the potency is naturally present in the soul and the form is simply the received species. With that, the conditions for the act of knowledge are fulfilled.

In this connection, also, we ought to point out, at least in passing, that the species or form (of the object) received by the intellect is not at all that which is known, *quod cognoscitur*, but only that by which the knower knows, *quo cognoscitur*.<sup>45</sup> What is directly apprehended is the object or thing itself. The species, which is the initial or preparatory phase in the process of knowledge, is not known directly, but only secondarily through an act of reflection. We shall have more to say on this particular topic when dealing with the mental word.<sup>46</sup>

d) *The species as a likeness of the object.*—Even though, as we have insisted, the species is not the object that is known directly, we must not conclude that it has no connection with this object. On the contrary, the very function of the species is to unite the object with the intellect, causing it to be present in the intellect. The species performs this role by being a likeness of the object. Being like the object, it can take its place in the mind. The source, it may be recalled, for this general notion of species as likeness or similitude is *Empedocles*, with his doctrine that like is known by like. He was wrong, however, in thinking that the likeness in question had to be understood as a physical facsimile. Instead, it should be conceived as a reproduction of the intentional order, for the mode of existence in the mind is not the same as in reality.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the likeness of the thing is not necessarily a complete and exhaustive re-presentation, but admits of degrees of reproduction. Indeed, the human intellect, as we shall have more than one occasion to repeat, does not at first glance or, to change the metaphor, by one stroke cut clear through the surface of a thing, to have,

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 85, a. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Text VIII, "The Role of the Species in Intellection," p. 266.

as it were, a full view of its real essence on the spot. At the outset it perceives the essence rather vaguely, through the medium of very general concepts; for, the first likenesses or species represent the object mostly in its very common aspects. The real work of the intellect consists, precisely, in evermore determining and defining the general content of these, our primitive concepts.

## † CHAPTER 7

# The Activity of the Intellect and the Growth of Intellectual Knowledge

### Part One: The Activity of the Intellect

† BESIDES the two already-explained factors entering into intellectual activity and forming its groundwork, namely, the proper object and the formation of the intelligible species, St. Thomas enumerates two other integral elements of this activity. These are understanding or intellection (*intelligere*) and the interior conception of the intellect (*conceptio intellectus*), in which the intellect contemplates its object. "One who understands," writes St. Thomas, "may have a relation to four things in understanding: namely to the thing understood, to the intelligible species whereby his intelligence is



made actual, to his act of understanding, and to his intellectual concept."<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, we shall have to consider these two additional elements, that is, intellection itself and the conception or mental word of the intellect. Then, coming back for a moment to the phantasm, which lies at the origin of intellectual activity, we shall have to explain that this activity always implies a reference or return to the sensible object. In dealing with this whole question of intellectual activity, moreover, St. Thomas himself, more often than not, comes to it by way of interpreting a theological doctrine, notably that of the divine generation of the Word, the result being that his discussion, generally speaking, goes beyond Aristotle. Our presentation of the matter, therefore, will be along the lines of these larger developments in St. Thomas.<sup>2</sup>

## I. INTELLECTION

a) *Intellection is the ultimate perfection of the subject.*—According to Aristotle, it is characteristic of physical activity to pass in some way from the agent to the exterior thing, with the effect of producing a change in the latter. But we know, from what has been said about intellect, that in intellectual activity the situation is not at all the same. The higher one goes in the scale of living beings, the more one finds an innerness of activity, and the less the subject has recourse and reference to things outside. What this means is that the higher a

<sup>1</sup> "Intellectus autem in intelligendo ad quatuor potest habere ordinem: scilicet ad rem quae intelligitur, ad speciem intelligibilem, qua fit intellectus in actu, ad suum intelligere, et ad conceptionem intellectus" (*De Pot.*, q. 8, a. 1).

<sup>2</sup> Our principal references will be to the following texts of St. Thomas: *Contra Gentiles*, I 53; *De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 1; q. 9, aa. 5, 9; *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 2; *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 14, a. 4; q. 27, a. 1; q. 34, aa. 1, 2. As for the commentators, consult in particular John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Philosophicus*, IV Pars, q. 11, aa. 1, 2; ed. Reiser, III, 344 ff.

being is in the scale of life, the more it advances from transitive activity to immanent activity, of which certainly, intellectual knowledge is the most perfect instance.

It follows, then, that in intellection or intellectual knowledge, what is changed is not the exterior thing but the knowing subject himself. On several occasions St. Thomas points out that this modification of the knowing subject may be compared to the receiving of existence (*esse*) in a concrete essence. "To understand," he says in explaining this particular item, "is not an act passing to anything extrinsic; for it remains in the operator as his own act and perfection, as existence is the perfection of the one existing: just as existence follows on the form, so in like manner to understand follows on the intelligible species."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, as in the order of being the "*esse*" represents the ultimate perfection of a thing, so, in a similar way, does intellection (*intelligere*) in the order of knowledge and, more generally, in the order of activity. Moreover, the perfection inherent in intellection is, as already indicated, an immanent one, which means that it is appointed for the good of the subject and does not produce an outside effect, being so to speak its own term. We have here simply to do with something ultimate, an ultimate term.

b) *Intellection is an action in the predicament of quality.*— In discussing the special character of intellection, John of St. Thomas, who has a knack for getting things properly classified, goes to some length showing that intellectual activity belongs to the predicament of quality.<sup>4</sup> Intellection, he observes,

<sup>3</sup> "Intelligere non est actio progrediens ad aliquid extrinsecum, sed manet in operante sicut actus et perfectio ejus, prout esse est perfectio existentis; sicut enim esse consequitur formam, ita intelligere sequitur speciem intelligibilem" (*Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 14, a. 4). Cf. also *ibid.*, q. 34, a. 1 ad 2; John of St. Thomas, *op. cit.*, q. 11, a. 1, *Dico ultimo* (ed. Reiser, III, 350 f.).

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, IV Pars, q. 11, a. 1, *Dico secundo*; ed. Reiser, III, 346 ff.

denotes a certain kind of action; but action strictly speaking implies a corresponding passion or a being-acted-on in another subject (patient), which undergoes a change from the action. This condition, however, does not exist in intellection, since the change it produces is all in the agent or knower. As we have said, intellection, considered precisely as action, does not act upon another, and so does not have an outside effect. Briefly, because it is wholly a disposition of the agent or faculty, intellection cannot be placed in the predicament of action proper but must be referred to the predicament of quality.

Our main interest in this particular point is that it serves to emphasize the difference between cognitive activity, which is the perfect example of immanent action, and physical or transitive action. In other words, to act is something far different for a spirit and a material thing. Many unnecessary difficulties incident to the study of knowledge arise from the failure to heed this elementary truth, if not indeed truism.

c) *Intellection is virtually productive of an exterior term, the mental word.*—We have said that intellection is an immanent activity, producing no outside effect. Still, matters are not quite so simple as we have depicted them. As understood by St. Thomas, intellection does in fact produce some sort of term or quasi-term, which is interior to intellection, yet really distinct from it. This term is called indifferently the mental word, *verbum mentis*, and the understood idea or conception, *conceptio intellecta*. To put it concretely, when I contemplate an object—in fact, in order to contemplate it at all—I form in my intellect an idea or representation of the object, by means of which the object becomes present to me. For, when an intellect thinks it does, indeed, contemplate, but it also conceives, that is, forms an idea.

What, then, is this term that the intellect conceives? And



the act of conceiving it, is it really distinct from the act of understanding, that is, intellection. And how, precisely, are these two aspects of the act of knowledge related to each other, that is, the mental word and intellection? These are the questions to which we must now turn.

## II. THE MENTAL WORD

### 1. *The Study of the Mental Word in Its Thomistic Setting*

Many difficulties relating to the Thomistic doctrine on the mental word need not arise at all. They spring from insufficient attention to the differences of setting that mark the various texts commonly cited in explanation of this doctrine.

On the one hand, we find a whole series of texts on knowledge in which no mention at all is made of an interior term or word. In these passages St. Thomas is simply following Aristotle's teaching to the letter. What is directly apprehended, he declares on these occasions, is the thing, the *res*, and not any modification that might take place in the intellect. To take the opposite view, namely, that the thing is not directly apprehended, is to fall into the impossible relativism of Protagoras, whose opinion it was that nothing can be known absolutely and all knowledge is relative or purely subjective. In this theory a truth is nothing more than the way a thing appears to me at any given moment; what it will be at the next I cannot know, for I cannot make the transition from subjective impressions to objective and abiding realities. Thus, all science and truth are jeopardized, and in fact destroyed. Against this view St. Thomas insists that the intelligible species, or subjective modification, is only a principle by which the thing is known, a *principium quo*. The intelligible species, therefore, is not the direct object of the intellect, but merely

a preliminary step to the act of knowledge, a step, moreover, that is not immediately or directly known, but only indirectly through reflection.

As for the doctrine of the mental word, its whole development in St. Thomas is found in an altogether different series of texts, occurring, with the possible exception of two or three passages, in connection with and in furtherance of the theological doctrine regarding the divine generation of the second Person in God. Such a generation can be conceived only after the manner of a process of knowledge. Since the divine generation within the Trinity could be compared to the production of a term interior to the intellect, one would naturally be curious to know whether such a term is found in all intellection.

Here, incidentally, is one of the best examples of a philosophical doctrine being developed under the influence of a doctrine of faith. For, even though in point of fact the doctrine of the mental word was inspired by theological considerations, it may also be approached as a philosophical problem, inasmuch as in the act of knowledge the intellect certainly gives expression to its knowledge, and this expression has somehow to be explained. Since, moreover, intellectual activity is an immanent operation, it is only logical to look for the term of this expression in something interior to thought.<sup>5</sup>

*Note on terminology.*—Ordinarily, when St. Thomas uses the expression "*verbum mentis*"—in contrast to the "*verbum oris*," the spoken word—it has a Trinitarian reference. When, on the other hand, he is writing from a psychological standpoint, he prefers the expressions "*conceptio*" or "*intentio intellecta*." Modern Scholastics commonly employ the phrase "*impressed species*," which denotes the form as the principle of knowledge, and its correlative, "*expressed species*," which designates the form as the object of knowledge and corre-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Text IX, "The Mental Word," p. 271.

sponds to the "intentio intellecta." As noted in the chapter on sense knowledge, this modern usage is not of Thomistic origin, but represents a later adoption.

## 2. *The Reason for the Production of the Word*

a) In a well-known and basic text on the matter, occurring in the *Contra Gentiles*,<sup>6</sup> St. Thomas gives two reasons for the existence of a mental word in intellectual knowledge. One reason is that the intellect can know things in their absence as well as in their presence. Whenever it knows them in their absence, not to say in their presence, it must obviously have a representation or vicegerent of the object known. A second and more basic reason, applying equally to things present and absent, is that the object known by the intellect must be apprehended apart from the conditions of matter; if, then, the object to be known intellectually is a material thing, it has to receive an immaterial mode of existence, and this it can have only from and within the intellect itself.

These reasons for the necessity of a mental word, however, are grounded in the comparative imperfection of human knowledge; of themselves they do not provide an adequate analogical foundation for explaining the Trinitarian doctrine of generation in terms of a mental word. That is why John of St. Thomas,<sup>7</sup> on the strength of certain passages in St. Thomas, insists that the production of a mental word may be due, not only to the limitations of an intellect, as in the human intellect, but also to its very perfection, as in the divine intellect. According to John of St. Thomas, by nature an intellect is moved to manifest and express what it understands; the more perfectly it understands, the more it naturally inclines to manifest and communicate itself, and never more so than in the divine

<sup>6</sup> *Contra Gentiles*, I, 53.

<sup>7</sup> *Cursus Philosophicus*, Pars IV, q. 11, a. 1 (Reiser, III, 348 f.); a. 2 (Reiser, III, 356 ff.).



intellect, which expresses itself in the substantial generation of the Word. Nevertheless, the production of a mental word, he argues, is not an absolute and universal necessity, since we know, at least from theology, that the Son and the Holy Spirit understand without producing a word. Furthermore, the production of a word is not to be taken as the ultimate term of intellection, since from the standpoint of activity the ultimate or absolute term of intellection is intellection itself. If a word is produced at all, it is not for its own sake, but for the sake of intellection.

b) A further question is whether every act of understanding of the created intellect requires the production of a mental word. In human knowledge such a production occurs not only in regard to the knowledge of material things but also in the knowledge of the soul through itself. But the angel, too, knows himself only through a mental word, even though his essence, which is the proper object of his intellect, is immediately present to himself. St. Thomas admits only one instance of created intellection that does not require the production of a mental word, and that is the beatific vision. Since God is utterly intelligible in Himself, He can be the immediate and direct term of the act by which His essence is seen; not to mention that His essence, being infinite, could not be adequately represented by any created likeness or similitude.

### 3. *The Mental Word As Production and As Likeness*

The mental word in knowledge has a twofold reference. It may be considered in relation to the intellectual activity that produces it, and to the thing that it represents.

a) *The mental word as production.*—Is the production of the mental word simply the result and effect of intellection, or does it imply a separate activity of the intellect? St. Thomas holds for the first alternative.<sup>8</sup> Such a distinct operation for the production of a mental word would amount to an un-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *De Verit.*, q. 4, a. 2 ad 5.

warranted and unnecessary duplication of the act that constitutes for us the proper act of knowledge. So, the intellect's expressing itself (*dicere*), although it is sometimes considered separately, is not really distinct from intellection proper (*intelligere*). The mental word, then, is simply the immediate and straightaway result of intellection itself; but, as will be remembered, it is not the ultimate end or term of intellection. We may also note that, like the intelligible species or "species quo," and for the same reasons, the mental word can be considered both objectively, meaning according to its representative or intentional being, and entitatively, thus denoting its condition as a real accident modifying the intelligent subject.

b) *The mental word as likeness*.—With reference not to the subject producing it, but to the object known, the mental word has the nature of a likeness. It is a likeness of the exterior thing because the intelligible species, which is the immediate principle or starting point of act of the intellect, is itself a likeness of the same thing. St. Thomas says as much when he writes: "It is because the intelligible species, which is the form of the intellect and the principle of understanding, is the image (*similitudo*) of the external object, that the intellect in consequence forms an intention like that object."<sup>9</sup>

If the mental word is a likeness, what precise aspect of the thing does it represent? In general, likeness means to be identical with something according to the predicament of quality. In the present context, however, the term "quality" is to be taken in a rather large sense, so that the mental word as a likeness signifies primarily, not an accidental quality, but the specific difference or essence of the thing. Its immediate and direct reference, therefore, is to the essence of the thing known, though at first representing it only imperfectly. As we already know and shall have further occasion to declare in studying the growth of knowledge, the first apprehensions of our intellect are very general notions, lacking in depth and distinctness.

<sup>9</sup> *Contra Gentiles*, I, 53.

Consequently, the representations or mental words corresponding to these apprehensions cannot but be similarly incomplete and imperfect; which is to say, in sum, that the work of discovering and determining the plenary likeness of mental word to thing is a gradual and indeed a continual process.

#### 4. *The Mental Word: Relative or Ultimate Term of Knowledge?*

a) *The problem.*—The interposition of an immanent term between the intellect and the exterior thing brings up a rather serious problem regarding knowledge? It may be asked whether it is really the thing itself that is immediately apprehended by the intellect, or whether it is the interior conception of the mind. If we say it is the latter, have we not destroyed the realism, that is, the objective validity of knowledge, since in that case what is directly known is not the exterior thing but an interior modification or determination of the act of knowledge.

This particular aspect of the problem of knowledge does not loom large in the speculations of medieval Scholastics; but subsequently it became more and more prominent, reaching the full peak of its urgency with the flowering of modern idealism, and ever since it has been a focal point of philosophical debate within as well as without scholastic circles. Witness, for example, the recent discussion, not to say controversy, among certain present-day Thomists on the nature and function of the mental word or concept.<sup>10</sup> Since this discussion did not dispel all confusion, it may not be useless to say a further word or two on the point in question.

<sup>10</sup> For the particulars of the debate the reader may consult J. Maritain, *Réflexions sur l'intelligence* (Paris: Desclée, 1926), chap. 2; *Les degrés du savoir*, 3rd edit. (Paris: Desclée, 1946), chap. 3, no. 26 and Appendix I (Eng. trans., *The Degrees of Knowledge* [New York: Scribner's, 1938] pp. 144-155, which, however, altogether omits Appendix I as well as the others); M. D. Roland-Gosselin, *Rev. Sc. Phil. et Théol.*, 1925, pp. 200 ff.; F. A. Blanche, *Bull. Thom.*, 1925, pp. 361 ff.



b) *The texts of St. Thomas.*—On first reading the texts in which St. Thomas expresses himself on the immediate apprehension of the intellect, there would seem to be no hope of reducing them to a consistent statement. We find, on the one hand, a series of texts that are unequivocally on the side of immediate realism, and, on the other hand, another group that are just as categorically to the contrary, affirming that the mental word itself is the term or direct object of knowledge.

In support of (immediate realism) there is, for example, the perfectly clear presentation in the *Prima Pars*,<sup>11</sup> where St. Thomas declares that what is directly known is the thing itself and not the species, which is only known on reflection: *quod cognoscitur est res*. Other passages are even more explicit, as this one from the *Contra Gentiles*: "That this same intelligible species is not the thing which we understand, is evident from the fact that to understand a thing is quite distinct from understanding its intelligible species; and the intellect does this when it reflects on its action."<sup>12</sup> According to this passage it is perfectly plain that the "intelligible intention," the mental word, is apprehended only in an act of reflection, and that the thing alone is known directly.

Other texts, unfortunately, seem to say just the opposite. Thus, in *De Potentia* St. Thomas asserts that "that which is understood in itself (*per se*) is not the thing that is known by the intellect, . . . [but] the first and direct (*primo et per se*) object in the act of understanding is something that the intellect conceives within itself about the thing understood."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 85, a. 2.

<sup>12</sup> "Quod praedicta intentio non sit in nobis res intellecta, inde apparet quod aliud est intelligere rem et aliud est intelligere ipsam intentionem intellectam, quod intellectus facit dum super suum opus reflectitur" (*Contra Gentiles*, IV, 11).

<sup>13</sup> "Id autem quod est per se intellectum non est res illa cuius notitia per intellectum habetur, . . . Hoc ergo est primo et per se intellectum, quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta" (*De. Pot.*, q. 9, a. 5).

In between these seemingly contradictory passages we find some, moreover, that appear to be aimed at reconciling the others, as the following one from *De Veritate*: "The intellectual conception is a medium between the intellect and the thing known, because through its mediation the intellectual operation attains the thing. Hence, the intellectual conception is not only that which is understood (*id quod intellectum est*) but also that by which the thing is understood (*id quo res intelligitur*). Consequently, that which is understood can be said to be both the thing itself as well as an intellectual conception (*sic quod intelligitur possit dici et res ipsa et conceptio intellectus*)."<sup>14</sup> Again, "The word," so reads another passage, "is compared to the intellect not as that by which it apprehends its object (*quo intelligit*), but as that in which it apprehends it (*in quo intelligit*), because it is in its formed and expressed word that the intellect sees the nature of the thing."<sup>15</sup>

c) *Interpretation of the doctrine.*—First of all, in order to bring this debate to some sort of focus, it has to be remembered that in the passages under consideration St. Thomas is speaking from two different points of view. For some of the texts the background or context is Aristotle's doctrine of knowledge, whereas for others it is the doctrine of the generation of the Person of the Word by the Father. In his doctrine of knowledge Aristotle was especially concerned with avoiding, among other things, the subjective interpretation of Protagoras, according to which the object of knowledge was the modification or impression produced in the knowing subject. Naturally, then, what one would stress in presenting the Aristotelian

<sup>14</sup> "Conceptio intellectus est media inter intellectum et rem intellectam, quia ea mediante operatio intellectus pertingit ad rem. Et ideo conceptio intellectus non solum est id quod intellectum est, sed etiam id quo res intelligitur; ut sic id quod intelligitur, possit dici et res ipsa, et conceptio intellectus" (*De Verit.*, q. 4, a. 2 ad 3).

<sup>15</sup> *Comment. in Joan.*, c. 1.

theory of knowledge is the immediacy or directness of knowledge. In speaking as a theologian, on the other hand, one would want to show that there is a term interior to thought, and so be led to emphasize the quality of immanence found in the act of knowledge.

With this in mind, it may not be too bold to suggest that in expressing himself on the matter in question St. Thomas simply did not take the trouble to call attention to the context of his assertions in every instance, being more intent on building up his case in one or the other direction as the occasion demanded. Accordingly, the texts that are most truly representative of his thought, and which ought therefore to be given priority, are those in which both aspects of knowledge, that is, both its immanence and its immediacy with the exterior thing, are set forth. All in all, then, provided that we know how to interpret the statement, it is quite correct to say that what is apprehended by the intellect is both the thing itself and the conception of the intellect: *et ipsa res et conceptio intellectus*. Consequently, the mental word can be both what is understood, *quod intellectum est*, and that by which understanding takes place, *quo intelligitur*. It is indeed a term, but only a relative one; the ultimate or absolute term is the thing itself.<sup>16</sup>

d) *The mental word as a formal sign*.—Sometimes the mental word is further explained as a *sign*, a development which, apparently, should be accredited to John of St. Thomas.<sup>17</sup> So understood, the interior conception of the mind is a sign of the thing that it represents. Note well, however, that there are two kinds of signs, one *instrumental*, the other *formal*. The proper characteristic of the instrumental sign is to conduct the mind to something other than what is immediately perceived,

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Text VIII, "The Role of the Species in Intellection," p. 266.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, Log., Pars IIa, q. 22, aa. 1, 2; ed. Reiser, I, 693 ff.



that is, to something other than the sign itself: *quod praeter species quas ingerit sensui, aliud facit in cognitionem venire*. Thus, where I see smoke, I conclude there is fire, which is something other than the smoke itself. The formal sign also leads to the knowledge of something other than itself, but in such a way as to produce this knowledge within itself and in a direct manner, without an intermediate step of the mind. In this case the apprehension of the sign, and of the thing signified, are simultaneous.

There is no doubt that if the mental word is a sign, it has to be a formal one. Unlike the instrumental sign, the mental word is not something that is known first, and then leads us to the knowledge of another thing. Instead, it is something in which another thing is directly and immediately understood. Applied to the intellect, this interpretation means that even though the nature or essence of the exterior object is apprehended in and through a term immanent to the mind, it is nevertheless apprehended immediately.

We see, then, that the doctrine of formal sign preserves the simultaneity of the two aspects of intellectual knowledge which can be separated only at the expense of the objective validity of this knowledge. These two aspects are its immanence or interiority, and its immediacy with the nature of the external thing. Without immediacy we cannot avoid the breakdown of knowledge which is inherent in every allegedly mediate realism, according to which the mental image is installed, portrait-like, as the immediate object of knowledge. Not less important is it, however, to insist on the immanent character of knowledge, for without this aspect we become entangled in the sort of immediacy that cannot distinguish between entitative and intentional union, thus making no sense whatever.

### 5. *Synoptic View of the Act of the Intellect*

The integral act of the human intellect involves, as we have said, four elements: the faculty itself, the intelligible species

that actualizes the faculty, intellection or understanding, and the mental word. These several elements are not arbitrarily asserted; they are requirements imposed by the metaphysical principles underlying activity in general and intellectual activity in particular. Still, it ought to be borne in mind that to analyze something is not necessarily to dismember its reality. Despite the number of principles or factors of which it is constituted, the act of knowledge bears a real unity; in fact, what strikes us most at first glance is not its manifold character, but its basic unity. By way of conclusion to this particular heading on intellectual activity, we shall therefore quote at some length a chapter from the *Contra Gentiles* to which we have already referred and which contains an excellent, over-all account of the process of intellectual activity, both describing the steps of the process and intimating the real continuity from the first to the last:

The external objects which we understand do not exist in our intellect according to their own nature, but it is necessary that our intellect contain their species whereby it becomes intellect in act. And being in act by this species as by its proper form, it understands the object itself. And yet the act of understanding is not an act passing into the thing understood, as heating passes into the object heated, but it remains in the one who understands, yet bears a relation to the object understood, for the very reason that the aforesaid species, which is the formal principle of intellectual operation, is the image (*similitudo*) of that object.

It must furthermore be observed that the intellect informed by the species of the object, by understanding produces in itself a kind of intention of the object understood, which intention is the nature (*ratio*) of the object as expressed in its definition. This indeed is necessary, since the intellect understands indifferently a thing absent or present, and in this point agrees with the imagination; yet the intellect has this besides, that it understands a thing as separate from material conditions, without which it does not exist in reality; and this is impossible unless the intellect forms for itself the aforesaid intention.

Now this understood intention, since it is the term, so to speak, of the intellectual operation, is distinct from the intelligible species which makes the intellect in act, and which we must look upon as the principle of the intellectual operation, albeit each is an image of the object understood: since it is because the intelligible species, which is the form of the intellect and the principle of understanding, is the image (*similitudo*) of the external object, that the intellect in consequence forms an intention like that object: for such as a thing is, such is the effect of its operation. And since the understood intention bears the likeness of a thing (*est similis alicui rei*), it follows that the intellect by forming this intention understands that thing.<sup>18</sup>

### III. THE RETURN TO THE PHANTASMS

The starting point of intellectual knowledge, whose process we have just analyzed, lies in sense knowledge, or, to be more specific, in the phantasms. According to St. Thomas, phantasms or images are found not only at the beginning of the intellectual process but also at its term, where they serve as a link between the intellect and the external object. Consequently, both in acquiring new knowledge and in considering knowledge already possessed, the intellect cannot apprehend anything except by turning to the phantasms: *nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata*. This "conversion" or turning to the phantasm is not the same thing as the intellect's initial access to the sensible species in order to abstract the intelligible species; hence it denotes something more than the mere fact that knowledge by the intellect begins in the sensible. We shall have occasion to speak of the nature of this return to the phantasm in the second part of the present chapter, specifically in our discussion of the knowledge of the singular. At the moment, we are only concerned with the fact of this "conversion."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Contra Gentiles*, I, 53.

<sup>19</sup> On this point see *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 84, aa. 7, 8; q. 86, a. 1; q. 89, a. 1; Cajetan, *In Iam Part.*, q. 84, a. 7; John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Philosophicus*, IV Pars, q. 10, a. 4 (Reiser, III, 322 ff.).



a) *Proof from experience.*—In the principal text on this point, which occurs in the *Summa*,<sup>20</sup> St. Thomas appeals first of all to experience. Two facts serve to prove that the intellect must return to the phantasm in order to know. The first is that the activity of the intellect breaks down, in part or altogether, when certain corporeal structures sustain injury, depending on the nature and extent of the damage. Since, on the other hand, the intellect itself does not make use of a corporeal organ, the obstruction in question must reside in the sensory processes that are required for intellectual knowledge. So, for example, when the imagination fails, intellectual knowledge becomes impossible.

The second fact of experience is perhaps even more immediately convincing. The gist of it is that whenever we try to understand something, we naturally form and turn to certain images in which to inspect, as it were, what we are aiming to grasp intellectually. As St. Thomas has it: “Anyone can experience this of himself, that when he tries to understand something, he will form certain phantasms to serve him by way of examples, in which as it were he examines what he is desirous of understanding.”<sup>21</sup>

b) *Proof from deductive reason.*—The preceding facts can be verified on a priori grounds as well, inasmuch as the return of the phantasm is enforced by the very conditions surrounding the proper object of the human intellect. This object is the quiddity or nature of sensible things, which nature exists only in the singular, that is, in corporeal matter. The nature of a stone, for example, is such as to exist in this particular stone. Consequently, the nature of a stone or any material thing whatever cannot be known “completely” and “truly” unless it be understood as existing in the individual. The individual, however, is apprehended only by the senses or in the phantasms;

<sup>20</sup> Ia, q. 84, a. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

and so for the intellect to come to know its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasm, there to behold the universal nature existing in the individual. St. Thomas puts the argument as follows:

The proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is a quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter. . . . Now it belongs to such a nature to exist in an individual, and this cannot be apart from corporeal matter; for instance, it belongs to the nature of a stone to be in an individual stone, and to the nature of a horse to be in an individual horse, and so forth. Wherefore the nature of a stone or any material thing cannot be known completely and truly (*complete et vere*) except inasmuch as it is known as existing in the individual. Now we apprehend the individual through the senses and the imagination. And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual.<sup>22</sup>

c) *Conclusion: the continuity between operations of the intellect and the imagination, or of intellectual and sense knowledge in general.*—The doctrine of return to the phantasms clearly indicates that Thomistic philosophy, while uncompromising in affirming the essential and irreducible distinction between intellectual and sensory knowledge, is not less emphatic in its opposition to isolating and insulating these two forms of knowledge from each other. Evidence of this fact, if evidence were needed, is that the Thomistic doctrine of knowledge insists on the presence of the image both at the beginning of the intellectual process, where it serves as material for the intellect to work on, and at the end of the process, where it preserves the continuity between the intellect and its object. Indirectly, then, the singular can become the object of knowledge for our intellect; and since our practical life deals with the concrete, the intellect has constantly to refer to the singular. Though initially and essentially the faculty of the abstract

<sup>22</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 84, a. 7.

and the universal, the intellect thus emerges as the faculty of the concrete individual as well. These facts make for a psychology rich both in depth and complexity; and if all too often it is paraded forth in nothing more than threadbare formulas that make it appear simple, one need hardly be reminded that appearances may not be reality. More than one learner, if not teacher, has been taken unaware by this apparent simplicity.

## Part Two:

### *The Growth of Intellectual Knowledge*

The divine intellect, and also the angelic intellect with respect to its proper object, attain by one stroke the complete and perfect possession of the knowledge to which they are proportioned. The human intellect, however, which is lowest and weakest in the scale, gains its perfect act or complete knowledge, not at once but in progressive fashion. "Every power proceeding from potentiality to actuality," writes St. Thomas, "comes first to an incomplete act, which is the medium between potentiality and actuality, before accomplishing the perfect act. The perfect act of the intellect is complete knowledge, when the object is distinctly and determinately known; whereas the incomplete act is imperfect knowledge, when the object is known indistinctly, and as it were confusedly."<sup>23</sup> These remarks of St. Thomas, metaphysical and theoretical as they are, need no learned endorsement; they are simply borne out by every man's experience regarding his intellectual endeavors. Since, moreover, the problem of the growth of human intellectual knowledge is too many-sided to be treated in full here, we shall limit ourselves to unraveling certain difficulties connected with it, in the hope of throwing some light on the more important points involved.

<sup>23</sup> *Summa theol.* Ia, q. 85, a. 3.



# I. THE INITIAL DATUM OF THE INTELLECT AND THE APPREHENSION OF THE ESSENCE

a) *The initial apprehension of the essence.*—It is clear that the proper object of the human intellect, which is the quiddity of a sensible thing, must somehow be found in what this faculty grasps at first sight. St. Thomas indicates as much in a considerable body of texts. To the unsuspecting mind these texts might even give the impression that the essence is at the very first glance so apprehended as to be disclosed in its entirety. St. Thomas says, for example, that “the intellect reaches to the bare quiddity of the thing,”<sup>24</sup> and that “the intellect can immediately conceive the quiddity of the sensible thing.”<sup>25</sup> Would it not seem, then, that we can comprehend at once and in full, say, what man is, or a horse, or any sensible thing?

Nevertheless, taken literally and at face value, statements like the ones just quoted are so obviously contradicted by experience that it is impossible to regard them as the full and formal expression of St. Thomas' mind on the matter. Can anyone seriously propose that a mere glance is enough to discover the real and inmost nature of things around us? Besides, as is usually the case in such circumstances, there are other passages in which St. Thomas speaks in a different vein altogether. “Substantial forms in themselves (*per seipsas*),” he states explicitly, “are unknown; but we come to know them by their proper accidents.”<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere he argues that we do not know the essential differences of things,<sup>27</sup> and that our knowledge of the quiddity must be by way of the accidents and the effects of

<sup>24</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 10, a. 6 ad 2.

<sup>25</sup> *In Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 3.

<sup>26</sup> “Formae substantiales per seipsas sunt ignotae; sed innotescunt nobis per accidentia propria” (*De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, a. 11 ad 3).

<sup>27</sup> “Quia differentiae essentiales sunt nobis ignotae, quandoque utimur accidentibus vel effectibus loco earum” (*De Verit.*, q. 4, a. 1 ad 3).

a thing.<sup>28</sup> Such assertions would seem to be in clear disagreement with the others we have cited.

In the mind of St. Thomas, however, there is here no real, and no irreducible contradiction, since in one and the same article he himself declares both that the intellect in its first operation apprehends the essence of things and that the substantial forms are unknown.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, then, there is need of examining more closely what it is that the human intellect really grasps in its first operation or apprehension.

b) *Priority of knowledge of the more universal.*—St. Thomas himself provides the clue to the answer of the foregoing difficulty, if difficulty it be. According to a well-founded principle of the Thomistic doctrine of knowledge, what the human intellect first knows is the more universal or the more general, so that the course of human knowledge is from the more to the less universal.<sup>30</sup> What this means is that our first apprehensions are not of the specific essences but of the more general aspects of things, and therefore our primitive concepts are correspondingly general. The more general notion “animal,” for example, is prior, that is, known antecedently to the less general notion “man.” The same principle applies to all other objects of human knowledge. St. Thomas points out, moreover, that knowledge that is more general, is also more confused, which means lacking in distinctness and depth.

Applying this principle to the first apprehension of the intellect, we shall have to say that what is known of things in the first instance is indeed the essence, but under its most common aspect, namely, the aspect of being; the intellect merely knows its object as something that is. To put it somewhat differently—and this is equally fundamental in Aristotelian philosophy

<sup>28</sup> “Nos autem quidditates rerum ex accidentibus et effectibus cognoscimus” (*Contra Gentiles*, III, 91).

<sup>29</sup> *De Spirit. Creat.*, a. 11 ad 3, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 85, a. 3.

—the first notion conceived by the intellect, and the one to which all others are reducible, is that of being,<sup>31</sup> though not precisely being as formally conceived and defined by the metaphysician, but as apprehended in its most common and least determined meaning. Briefly, in its first apprehension of things the human intellect knows them only indiscriminately as beings.

c) *The progressive discovery of the essence.*—Beginning with its first apprehension, the intellect advances step by step toward the further discovery of the object, pursuing its inquiry both in the order of essence and being.

In the order of essence the intellect seeks to determine the specific differences of things, so as to determine their position in the scale of genera and species. The eventual goal of this search is the discovery of the specific nature that corresponds to the ultimate or complete definition of a thing, as, for instance, the definition of man as an animal endowed with reason. In the order of being, moreover, the intellect may continue to probe and to elucidate the most universal determinations of the notion of being, such as the transcendental properties of unity and truth and goodness. This line of development is the work of metaphysics. ↑

All in all, then,—to keep this discussion to its main point—the complete discovery and determination of the essence by the intellect lies over that long and difficult road beginning with its initially ill-defined apprehension and ending, ideally, with the perfect definition of the thing. Proportionately speaking, therefore, by keeping in mind the exact meaning in each case, the term “quidditas sensibilis” or sensible quiddity can be applied to the apprehension of the intellect at both extremes of this road (as well as at all intermediate points), that is, both

<sup>31</sup> “Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quo omnes conceptiones resolvit, est ens” (*De Verit.*, q. 1, a. 1).



to the initial discovery in which the intellect grasps the general notion of being, and to the ultimate apprehension in which, ideally, it encompasses the complete definition of its object.

d) *The inerrancy of the first apprehension of the intellect.*— It is a central teaching of Aristotelian psychology, repeated at almost every turn, that in regard to its proper object, which means in its essential operation, a faculty of knowledge cannot be in error. Accordingly, the human intellect cannot be mistaken in its first apprehension of the essence of things. *circa quod est non potest falli.*<sup>32</sup>

This statement, to be sure, can easily be misinterpreted, but it need not be, provided we remember what has been said so far about the first apprehension of the intellect. The fact is that in its first operation, which the Scholastics call the “*indivisibilium intelligentia*,” the mind or intellect is inerrant, that is, always true; the immediate apprehension of the object does correspond to the object as it exists in reality. But this initial understanding, as we have said repeatedly, is a very general and peripheral knowledge, far removed from the adequate expression of the essence of the thing that constitutes its complete definition.

Such a definition, if it is achieved at all, can come only after long search and analysis and comparison, a labor that is as difficult as it is involved; and in the course of this successive labor error may indeed creep in. If, for example, one should define man not only as a rational but also as a winged creature, one should be mistaken; but one should also have gone beyond the first operation of the mind in regard to man, beyond the “*indivisibilium intelligentia*.” Error, therefore, is possible, but not so long as the intellect remains strictly within the order of simple apprehension, which is the first operation of the mind. Error comes in subsequent operations, indirectly and, often at

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q.85, a.6.

least, inadvertently. Here again St. Thomas' teaching is not nearly so simple as it is made out to be in some textbook versions.

## II. THE INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE ("DISCURSUS")

Even within the limits of the first operation of the mind a certain growth in knowledge is possible. But it is not in the activity of the first operation that St. Thomas finds the basis of distinction between the human intellect, which is discursive in nature, and the angelic and divine intellects, which are essentially intuitive. St. Thomas observes: "The angelic and the divine intellect have the entire knowledge of a thing at once and perfectly."<sup>33</sup> The human intellect, on the other hand, advances in knowledge through composing and dividing in the act of judgment, and through reasoning: *componendo, dividendo, et ratiocinando*.<sup>34</sup> Compared with the higher spirits above him, which are intelligences in the proper sense, man therefore is a reasoning rather than an intellectual being: *animal rationale*.

The human intellect, to repeat, must resort to composing, dividing, and reasoning because in its first encounter with a thing it does not attain perfect knowledge of the object, but only a general understanding of one of its aspects, its quiddity or nature; and this knowledge of the nature, as we know, is only approximative at first, admitting of progressive, if not indefinite, development. Following its first apprehension, the intellect must continue to discover, by degrees, the various properties and accidents of the thing together with the further elements comprised in its essence. To acquire this increase of knowledge, the intellect must proceed by way of comparison

<sup>33</sup> "Intellectus angelicus et divinus statim perfecte totam rei cognitionem habet" (*Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 85, a. 5).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. also Ia, q. 58, aa. 3, 4.

and analysis, joining further determinations to the general notion of being, and disjoining others; which is to say it must proceed by way of judgment and, in the matter of inferential knowledge, by way of reasoning.

St. Thomas analyzes the discursive character of the human intellect in the following passage:

Since the intellect passes from potentiality to act, it has a likeness to things which are generated, which do not attain to perfection all at once but acquire it by degrees. So likewise the human intellect does not acquire perfect knowledge by the first act of apprehension; but it first apprehends something about its object, such as its quiddity, and this is its first and proper object; and then it understands the properties, accidents, and various relations (*habitudines*) of the essence. Thus it necessarily compares one thing with another by composition or division; and from one composition and division it proceeds to another, which is the process of reasoning.<sup>35</sup>

The foregoing description, let it be said again, while complete as to the essentials, is nevertheless a mere general statement, greatly simplified and conventionalized, of the course of human thought in the concrete.

*Corollary: knowledge as activity.*—Initially, according to Aristotelian and scholastic doctrine, a faculty of knowledge is essentially passive or receptive; it is, to use a classical analogy, a clean slate on which the external world must leave its inscription. In the modern philosophical mind this view of the matter, when first approached, almost invariably produces a certain uneasiness. For, the modern philosopher is inclined to take just the opposite view. As he sees it, the intellect is more properly an active faculty. Happily, his difficulty is more apparent than real; and if our preceding discussion has shown anything at all, it is that the intellect is not only a passive but also, in fact one might say especially, an active faculty.

<sup>35</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q.85, a.5.



St. Thomas himself by no means overlooks the active role of the intellect. Indeed, the intellect has an active part even at the beginning of all its knowledge; for, it must take the initiative in abstracting the intelligible species from the phantasm, without which there can be no reception of the species. Moreover, intellection itself, engendered within the very bosom as it were of the faculty, is a vital activity, which further evidences its fecundity in the production of a mental word. Besides, in order to acquire a clear and distinct knowledge of its object our intellect, as we have insisted all along, has to perform an immense labor upon and beyond its initial data. Also, it is worth noting that the mind not only reproduces reality truly and faithfully, but over and above this it constructs for itself a whole world of beings that do not exist in reality, namely, beings of reason, *entia rationis*. On all these counts, and more, the human intellect declares itself a faculty endowed with activity.

Nevertheless, important as it is to insist on the active character of the intellect, hardly less imperative is it to bear in mind that the essential act of this faculty, the "intelligere" or understanding, is activity only in a higher sense, implying strictly speaking neither progression nor movement, its perfection residing in the very absence or cessation of motion, that is, in immobility. In a very profound sense, for the intellect to understand is to be: *intelligere est esse*. Whatever change or succession occurs in the life of thought is always in function of eventual and final repose, or, if one prefers, in furtherance of that fullness of activity that constitutes life's highest attainment, namely, the pure contemplation of the object.

## † CHAPTER 8

# Knowledge of the Singular and of the Soul

## Part One: Knowledge of the Singular and the Existent Thing

† UP to this point we have depicted intellectual knowledge as knowledge in the abstract and of the universal. We have insisted that the intellect must divest the intelligible object of its matter and its individualizing conditions. Therefore, in apprehending its object, which is the essence of material things, the intellect prescind not only from everything that causes it to be singular but also, note well, from the very fact of its existence in reality. The concrete individual, such as Peter, or this man and this table, lies outside the proper object of our intellect. I may indeed form an abstract and universal idea of an individual thing; but this is knowing the individual

quidditatively. It is not an intellectual apprehension of the thing in its concrete reality.

Still, common experience shows that the intellect makes constant reference to individual things. St. Thomas notes three circumstances in which the fact is clearly observable.<sup>1</sup> One is when the intellect forms propositions in which the subject is a particular being, as in "Peter is a man." It is impossible to explain how propositions of this sort can be formed unless the intellect have previous knowledge of both terms involved, especially, in the present example, of the term "Peter." Another illustration occurs in the intellect's practical function of directing human action, something it cannot do without referring to things in the concrete singular; hence it must know such concrete beings. The third case in point has to do with the intellect's apprehension of itself in its own activity. Obviously, the intellect is a singular entity, and so is capable of knowing at least the singular object that it is.

The problem, then, is to reconcile these two equally assured theses, namely, that the object of the human intellect is abstract and universal, and this same intellect can also know the concrete singular. In Thomistic philosophy this problem gives rise to two separate but related and convergent lines of inquiry, the one bearing on the knowledge of the singular as singular, and the other on the knowledge of its existence. Accordingly, we shall consider these two points in order; but to keep the matter from becoming overinvolved we shall limit the immediate discussion to our knowledge of physical realities. As for the soul's knowledge of itself and its conscious activities, and the knowledge of transcendent realities, such as God and the angels, together with the experience that is proper to certain mystical states, these things are better left aside for the moment. We shall come back to some, if not all, of them in the sequel.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q.86, a.1.



## I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF SINGULARS

1. *The Teaching of St. Thomas*

a) *Knowledge of the singular is only indirect.*—This is the position of St. Thomas, which, resting on principles that are basic to his whole philosophy, is logically unassailable. Here is how he explains his teaching, in terms that are clear and to the point:

Our intellect cannot know the singular in material things directly and primarily. The reason of this is that the principle of singularity in material things is individual matter, whereas our intellect, as we have said above (Ia, 85, 1), understands by abstracting the intelligible species from such matter. Now what is abstracted from individual matter is the universal. Hence our intellect knows directly the universal only. But indirectly, and as it were by a kind of reflexion (*indirecte et per quamdam reflexionem*), it can know the singular, because, as we have said above (Ia, 85, 7), even after abstracting the intelligible species, the intellect, in order to understand, needs to turn to the phantasms in which it understands the species, as is said in *De Anima*, III, 7 (431 b 1). Therefore it understands the universal directly through the intelligible species, and indirectly the singular represented by the phantasm.<sup>2</sup>

b) *The meaning of return to the phantasm.*—How is one to understand this “*conversio ad phantasmata*,” or return to the phantasm, which is essential to the indirect knowledge of the singular? Whatever the explanation, one thing is certain: the “*conversio*” in question is the same as the one that meets with attention in the problem whether the intellect can know without the medium of images or phantasms. Here we are asking just how this return is achieved. St. Thomas describes the process as follows:

<sup>2</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 86, a. 1. See also Ia, q. 14, a. 11; q. 57, a. 2; *Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 20; *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 5.

The mind has contact with singulars by reason of something else in so far as it has continuity with the sensitive powers which have particulars for their objects. . . . Thus, the mind knows singulars through a certain kind of reflection, as when the mind, in knowing its object, which is some universal nature, returns to knowledge of its own act, then to the species which is the principle of its act, and, finally, to the phantasm from which it has abstracted the species. In this way, it attains to some knowledge about singulars.<sup>3</sup>

According to this description the intellect grasps the singular by turning its awareness to the origin of its act. Reflecting on this act the intellect discovers that its principle is the intelligible species, which in turn is derived from the phantasm. Since the phantasm is always singular and particular, it is the medium by which the intellect is, so to speak, in contact and continuity with sense knowledge and with the object of sense knowledge, the singular. Only the senses have a direct perception of the singular, whereas the intellect's knowledge of the same is no more than indirect, that is, by way of return to the starting point of its knowledge, the phantasm.<sup>4</sup> A further question, however, is whether in this act of turning to the phantasm and knowing the singular, the intellect produces a proper concept of it. For the answer we turn next to the commentators.

## 2. *Elucidations of the Commentators*

a) *Regarding the "arguitive" knowledge of the singular proposed by Cajetan.*—According to Cajetan the intellect has no proper concept of the singular but apprehends it through another concept (*conceptu alieno*), which does however apply and refer in some way to the singular.<sup>5</sup>

In explanation of his view he cites the following comparison. Take, he says, the notion of infinite wisdom. When we think

<sup>3</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Text X, "The Knowledge of Singulars," p. 272.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *In Iam Part.*, q. 86, a. 1, n. vii.

of infinite wisdom we have in mind something of which we cannot have a proper but only an inadequate concept. So, too, with the singular as singular. We can indeed understand what the singular is when conceived universally, but we cannot conceive what it is in particular or as singular. We can understand what Socrates is essentially or universally, but we cannot have a proper concept of Socrates in his individuality, that is, of "Socrateity."

How, then, does the intellect know Socrates the individual? Cajetan answers that it knows him *arguitive*, which means through a kind of reasoning process. Thus, we conceive what man is and what singularity is; but we also know that man so conceived, or universal man, does not exist. Therefore, we "argue" or conclude that there is in reality some singular thing which differs from universal man by a difference we cannot conceive quidditatively; and this thing is "Socrateity" or Socrates in his individuality. In this view, then, we do not have a formal and proper representation of the singular, but we infer the singular from another concept (*conceptu alieno*) when finding, upon reflection, that the origin of this concept is in the singular, so that the singular is contained, obscurely and connotatively, in the abstracted concept. Accordingly, the concept of "Socrates" is nothing more than the universal concept of "man," but referred by a sort of implicit reasoning process to the singular person perceived by the senses.

b) *The concept of the singular according to John of St. Thomas.*—John of St. Thomas takes a different view.<sup>6</sup> According to him our concept of the singular, while not direct and adequate, is nevertheless proper and distinct. Otherwise, he believes, it would be impossible to discriminate between one individual and another, or to form perfectly clear judgments regarding individuals, such as "Peter is a man" and "John was not Christ." The main difference would seem to be that in

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Cursus Philosophicus*, IV Pars, q. 10, a. 4; ed. Reiser, III, 322 ff.



his view the mere advertence of the intellect to the image-bound origin of the concept is enough to associate it with the singular, whereas Cajetan thinks that the intellect must resort to a kind of reasoning process in order to refer the concept to the singular. In both instances, however, we have a concept of the singular, say of Socrates, a concept which, when coupled with sense knowledge, specifically with the image or phantasm, applies only to Socrates.

John of St. Thomas was not unmindful that his opinion entailed some difficulties. One of these pertains to the fundamental Aristotelian teaching that intellectual knowledge is first and foremost of the universal, even though each concept must be referred to an image, which represents, not the universal, but the singular. But if mere reference to the image suffices for the concept of the singular, it would seem that in the beginning all our concepts are proper and distinct (though admittedly indirect), concepts of the singular instead of the universal.

To this objection John of St. Thomas replies that what determines the concept is the term of the movement of thought.<sup>†</sup> In apprehending an object the intellect may stop at the universal, or it may move on to the singular, which is contained connotatively and obscurely in the universal. In the first case we have a universal concept, which is the only kind that represents the object directly and adequately; in the second case, a concept of the singular, one which represents its object only indirectly and inadequately. But it is by one continuous act that the intellect grasps the universal and moves from the universal to the singular. Parenthetically, it may be noted that this way of portraying the knowledge of the singular has the advantage of underlining the real unity of the activity of the mind, a unity that is sometimes lost sight of through overemphasis on the distinction of faculties and their objects.

<sup>†</sup> *Loc. cit.*, (Reiser, III, 329).

It needs to be remembered that what is parceled out, and legitimately so, for purposes of study, must be again reunited in one and the same living, conscious subject.

## II. THE KNOWLEDGE OF CONCRETE EXISTENCE

The problem of knowing concrete existence, that is, the existence of the thing perceived by sense, is closely related to the problem of knowing the singular, since only the singular exists in reality. The basic reason why the intellect experiences a certain obstacle in knowing the singular and concrete existence is the materiality or potentiality by which they are limited. In itself neither the singular nor existence is unintelligible; what prevents the intellect from knowing them directly is, as we have said, the material conditions by which they are circumscribed in the world around us.

Furthermore, to prevent misunderstanding it should be clearly noted that the knowledge of existence under discussion is not the universal or quidditative conception which the intellect forms of existence. Thus, I can have a common or universal idea of existence or what exists. Also—and this is still more to the point—even in its first apprehension of an object, in which it forms the notion of being, the mind makes some reference to existence, inasmuch as being, of which it forms a notion, is that which exists or can exist. Hence, in its first recognition of the object the intellect somehow incorporates both the abstract order of the universal and the concrete order of existence, though not each in the same direct manner. It is precisely this circumstance that permits the intellect to go from one order to the other. As we have said, however, the existence under consideration is not existence in general, nor even as implied in the notion of being. It is rather the existence of a given object in the concrete, such as that of Socrates the individual. Finally, the reader is once more reminded that we

are deliberately limiting the discussion to the knowledge which the human intellect has of the concrete reality perceived by sense. Our knowledge of spiritual realities, or the knowledge of concrete existence by the angelic and divine intellects, these points are not now at issue.

### 1. *The Knowledge of the Contingent in General*

The problem of the human intellect's knowledge of concrete existence is part of the more general doctrine regarding the knowledge of contingent being in general by any intellect, whether human or otherwise.<sup>8</sup> Contingent being is that which does not exist necessarily; it may or may not exist. On the other hand, intellectual knowledge is of the necessary rather than the contingent. How, then, does the intellect succeed in knowing such being. It should be said at once that the intellect may indeed have quidditative knowledge of the contingent, as of the material singular, but this is not now in debate. Even in a contingent being there are certain necessary determinations that arise from its form or nature, and these determinations, it is plain, the intellect can conceive. For example, if I should announce that Socrates is going to run, it will be necessary that he move; for, granted that his running is a contingent thing, the relation of running to motion is not contingent but necessary. Yet, how do I actually know that Socrates is running when running, since this fact is not necessary but contingent?

St. Thomas explains the question in much the same manner as the knowledge of the singular; and, in fact, the two problems reduce to one, seeing that matter is the principle both of contingency and singularity or individuation. Accordingly, the contingent, like the singular, is apprehended directly by sense and indirectly by the intellect. In the words of St. Thomas: "The contingent, considered as such, is known directly by

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q.86, a.3.



sense and indirectly by the intellect.”<sup>9</sup> Briefly, this means that the intellect knows concrete existence in and through reflection on the phantasm, which is to say indirectly. Only the senses have a direct perception of this existence. So much for a preliminary explanation of the matter. The whole question admits of further clarification from another quarter, as we shall see in a moment.

## 2. The Knowledge of Vision or “*per praesentiam*”

a) *The divine knowledge of vision.*—St. Thomas’ most complete word on knowledge of the contingent occurs in connection with the special case of God’s understanding of the same.<sup>10</sup> Basically, we may distinguish two kinds of knowledge in God. One is His knowledge of vision (*scientia visionis*), which is of things in their concrete existence, whether of things past, present, or future. The other is His knowledge of simple understanding (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*), which pertains to those possible realities that He could produce but never has and never will.<sup>11</sup> In general, this distinction corresponds to the distinction in the human intellect between its apprehension of the concrete existent and its abstractive knowledge. For this reason it is not without present interest to examine more closely the difference between the two types of knowledge found in God.

John of St. Thomas,<sup>12</sup> basing himself on certain passages in St. Thomas,<sup>13</sup> concludes that the knowledge of vision differs from the knowledge of simple understanding in that the former adds to the latter something which, strictly speaking, is out-

<sup>9</sup> “Contingentia, prout sunt contingentia, cognoscuntur directe quidem sensu, indirecte autem intellectu” (*ibid.*).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 14, a. 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Cursus Philosophicus*, Log., Pars IIa, q. 23, aa. 1, 2; ed. Reiser, I, 722 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Particularly from *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 3.

side the order of knowledge or representation (*extra genus notitiae*), this additional element being the presence of the thing known. In the knowledge of vision, therefore, the thing, though conceived in an abstract manner, is seen and understood as present. The "vision" of something, as John of St. Thomas observes, always denotes the apprehension of an object that really exists. In modern usage the more common term for this sort of knowledge is "intuition" or "intuitive knowledge." The interpretation of John of St. Thomas is confirmed by the fact that St. Thomas himself, when treating of the actual knowledge of the contingent, always speaks of the presence of the thing. In its formal meaning, therefore, knowledge of vision is knowledge *per praesentiam*, which is to say knowledge that comes from the presence of a thing.

b) *The knowledge of vision of the human intellect.*—John of St. Thomas, with whose interpretation we agree, applies the foregoing analysis to human knowledge. As we know, this knowledge at first is abstract and conceptual. It must therefore undergo some sort of modification in order to attain and embrace existence in the concrete. Conformably to the aforesaid analysis of God's knowledge, we shall have to say that before the human intellect can apprehend the existence of the concrete reality, the concept, which prescind from existence, must be referred to the thing as present, that is, as coexistent to the faculty. Our knowledge, in other words, must terminate in the thing itself. Such knowledge demands the concrete or physical presence of the object, and not merely its representative or intentional presence, which is necessary even for conceptual knowledge. For example, I know that God is everywhere present, but this sort of knowledge is not enough to say that I see Him, since it is not a knowledge of vision of God, not a knowledge *per praesentiam*. Furthermore, the presence of which we speak always presupposes the action of the object on the faculty; and so, without such action the

object is not present to the faculty. Consequently, the human intellect's knowledge of the concrete world rests in the last analysis on the causal efficacy of the object.

### CONCLUSION: THE JUDGMENT OF EXISTENCE

Concrete existence is affirmed in a judgment, which is the second operation of the mind. Thus, when I say, "This thing that I perceive actually exists," I am affirming the thing's existence in reality, and this affirmation is a judgment. The judgment is, so to speak, the completion and consummation of the act of understanding. Reflecting on the origin of its knowledge, which is in sense knowledge, the mind through judgment makes explicit what was already implicitly given in its first operation or simple apprehension.

The process of positing existence may be outlined as follows. Let us say an object is present to my senses. Through abstraction I conceive it intellectually as something that is, and thereby I obtain a confused, which means a general, notion of material being. At the same time, however, the mind becomes aware that this initial conception is linked to the object which it apprehends as present. If, then, I analyze this primitive datum I find that it involves both a determined subject and actual existence. Seeing that actual existence belongs to this subject, I attribute existence to it in a judgment that says in effect: "This thing exists." With this judgment I not only affirm the concrete nature of the thing perceived but I also take cognizance of the truth of my thought, because the truth of the human mind is measured by the object.

To sum up: The judgment of existence completes the cycle of intellectual activity, which strives not only for a quidditative knowledge of the object, but seeks to know it down to its ultimate and crowning actuality, which is existence. This judgment, however, is only a first step in the process of coming



to know the thing. As previously explained, between this initial acquaintance and the clear and distinct knowledge of the essence of things, there lies a long and arduous road of intellectual effort.

## *Part Two: The Knowledge of the Soul Through Itself*

So far our study of the intellect has centered on its knowledge of material things, a consideration that is primary in the Aristotelian theory. Man's knowledge, however, goes much further. Besides his very real though indirect knowledge of God and other spiritual realities, we find in him an altogether unique instance of knowledge that is not of a purely material being, namely, of the thinking subject himself. In modern philosophy this area of psychology has been the object of special attention, resulting in the knowledge of the self becoming increasingly important.

With respect to the metaphysical aspect of the question at hand, one may ask, as many modern philosophers have done, whether the apprehension of the self is not the first principle of knowledge, whatever one's view of the self as such. Descartes (1596-1650), for example, sees the self as a spiritual substance. Maine de Biran (1766-1824) identifies it with a sort of deliberate striving, including both conative and motor activity; whereas Bergson (1859-1941) confuses it with duration. Fichte (1762-1814) has still another conception, making the self consist in a priori or absolute and unconditioned activity. As for Kant (1724-1804), who fathered Fichte, in his view the self is utterly unknowable in its essential nature, belonging to the inaccessible world of the noumenon.

For the moment we are not concerned with evaluating from our standpoint these different views of modern philosophy, which, incidentally, may be taken as representative. We shall

come back to them later. Our immediate task is to set forth the doctrine of St. Thomas, outlining the problem as it was presented to him in its historical setting and indicating the original developments he brought to it. In this way we shall also be preparing the ground for a more fruitful comparison of his doctrine with some others, such as those mentioned above.

## I. STATE OF THE PROBLEM IN ST. THOMAS

a) *The position of Aristotle.*—The problem relating to the knowledge of the soul and its activities occupies only a secondary place in the psychology of Aristotle. This psychology, as one can readily observe, intends above all to counteract the ultra-intellectualist interpretation of knowledge propounded by Plato; its main preoccupation throughout is to show conclusively that the knowledge of material things is first and fundamental to any other knowledge we may have. In such circumstances it is not surprising that Aristotle gives small consideration to the matter of the soul knowing itself directly. He does, however, touch on an allied question when he asks how we know the potencies of the soul. What gives point to this question is that by definition potencies are not acts, yet only what is in act is knowable or intelligible. How, then, is it possible to have a direct knowledge of the potencies?

Aristotle, in effect, replies that it is not possible. We know the potencies only through their acts. In Book II of *De Anima*,<sup>14</sup> describing the order of psychological investigation, he says that first we know the objects of the potencies, next the acts by which potencies are specified, and only then, through the acts, do we know the potencies, which are principles of the acts. The same thought emerges from St. Thomas' interpretation of a rather difficult passage in Book III of *De Anima*,<sup>15</sup> where, in a concluding remark, St. Thomas observes

<sup>14</sup> Chap. 4, 415 a 14-22.

<sup>15</sup> Chap. 4, 429 b 27-430 a 9.

that we know the intellect only through knowing the act of the intellect, that is, in understanding the act of understanding.<sup>16</sup> And if this be true of the intellect, is it not true of the self pure and simple—only more so? We know it, so it would seem, only indirectly, in and through its activities.

b) *The dilemma facing Christian Aristotelianism.*—On the whole, St. Thomas' contributions to this discussion are conceived along the lines suggested by Aristotle. With the one as with the other, the knowability of the potencies of the soul as well as of the intellectual soul itself is a metaphysical problem, turning on one overriding principle, which is that "everything is knowable so far as it is in act, and not so far as it is in potentiality."<sup>17</sup> All the arguments and all the proofs brought to bear, revolve, so to speak, upon this metaphysical axis.

Despite his Aristotelian lineage, however, when dealing with the knowledge of the soul St. Thomas could not completely ignore a tradition that took an altogether different view, especially since it was supported by not less an authority than St. Augustine. As is well known, in Augustinian thought the activity of the soul depended much less on sense perception than it did in Aristotelian doctrine; in fact, St. Augustine explicitly affirms that the soul knows itself directly through itself: *mens seipsam per seipsam novit*.<sup>18</sup> This remark, frequently cited by St. Thomas, embodies a spiritual and psychological tradition that to all appearances is the exact opposite of the more sense-bound intellectualism of Aristotle. Either, then, one must choose between these two positions or find a way of reconciling them, if that be possible.

What is here at stake—and this should be evident at once—is the very nature or innermost structure of the human being.

<sup>16</sup> "Non enim cognoscimus intellectum nostrum nisi per hoc, quod intelligimus nos intelligere" (*In III De Anima*, lect. 9, no. 724).

<sup>17</sup> "Unumquodque cognoscibile est secundum quod est in actu, et non secundum quod est in potentia" (*Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 87, a. 1).

<sup>18</sup> *De Trinitate*, IX, 3.



Is man no more than an embodied spirit? Is he not perhaps endowed, also, with the powers of a pure spirit, an angel—at least to a latent degree? Clearly, to raise these questions is to bring into debate nothing less than the essential nature and definition of man.

St. Thomas, it need hardly be said, understood the real meaning of the problem; and in general, here as almost always, he holds to the Aristotelian line. Interestingly enough, however, he was not to go all his life without manifesting some misgivings in favor of the view of the matter found in the Christian, specifically in the Augustinian, tradition. Indeed, in some of his earlier writings, for example in *De Veritate*, he evinces a considerable measure of agreement with the Augustinian notion of the soul's self-knowledge. Some years later, however, when discussing the same question in the *Summa*, he was to show greater reserve toward this view, while not, it would seem, rejecting it altogether. In the following pages, therefore, we shall examine his manner of dealing with the problem in two places of major importance, namely, his treatment in *De Veritate*<sup>19</sup> and his subsequent handling in the *Summa*,<sup>20</sup> these to be followed by a brief account of his answer to the problem—for it is a problem—regarding the knowledge which the separated soul has in and of itself, apart from supernatural considerations.<sup>21</sup> Having seen and understood what St. Thomas propounds in these articles, we shall also have met with his utmost thought on the subject. Furthermore, we shall have had a practical illustration of the way St. Thomas handles a question on which Aristotle and St. Augustine are seemingly at odds.

<sup>19</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 87, a. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 89, a. 1.

## II. CRITICAL EXPOSITION BY ST. THOMAS

1. *Assimilation of the Augustinian Legacy*

In *De Veritate* <sup>22</sup> St. Thomas submits the matter of the soul's direct knowledge of itself to a thoroughgoing critique. The question he raises is this: whether the intellectual soul (*mens*) knows itself directly through its essence, or indirectly through being actualized by species abstracted from phantasms—"Utrum mens seipsam per essentiam cognoscat, aut per aliquam speciem." Both sides of the question are set forth at length. The Aristotelian view in favor of indirect knowledge through species, "per speciem," is presented in a series of sixteen objections, followed by another series of eleven in support of the Augustinian thesis of direct knowledge through the essence, "per essentiam." Thus, the issue is met head on, so to speak.

St. Thomas begins the body of the article by noting that knowledge of the soul through itself may be taken in two ways. It may mean the knowledge by which the soul knows itself in those aspects that are proper to it alone, knowing itself as something concrete and individual, existing in this particular being. This is individual and concrete knowledge. But knowledge of the soul through itself may also mean the knowledge by which it knows itself in those aspects that are common to all souls. This is universal and abstract knowledge, by which the nature of the soul is known. Our present interest does not lie in this latter knowledge, the development of which pertains to the scientific study of the soul. Rather, our immediate attention centers on this rudimentary, prescientific, and experimental grasp which the soul has of itself. Here again, however, a distinction must be made. For even this primitive knowledge of itself may be *actual*, by which the soul knows itself through

<sup>22</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8.

its acts, as Aristotle affirms; or it may be *habitual*, by which the soul, it may be granted with St. Augustine, knows itself through its essence. Since the distinction made here by St. Thomas between actual and habitual knowledge is crucial to the whole problem under discussion, we must take a further look at these terms for their meaning in the present context.

a) *The actual knowledge of the soul through itself*.—St. Thomas explains very clearly what he means by this actual self-knowledge of the soul. Here are his own words: "Concerning the actual cognition by which one actually considers that he has a soul, I say that the soul is known through its acts. For one perceives that he has a soul, that he lives, and that he exists, because he perceives that he senses, understands, and carries on other vital activities of this sort."<sup>23</sup> For Aristotle, at least, the point made here by St. Thomas is not only a primitive but an irreducible datum of experience, since Aristotle gives no hint of a more direct knowledge of the soul. I know myself in and through my conscious activity, and in no other way. When this activity ceases, the awareness of myself likewise comes to a halt.

In Aristotelian doctrine, moreover, this conclusion can be established on a priori grounds, since it follows from the earlier-mentioned metaphysical principle underlying the Aristotelian theory of the knowability of things in general. Aristotle, in other words, insists that a thing is knowable or intelligible in so far as it is in act. Before the reception of the species, however, the intellect is only in potency with respect to the order of intelligible objects. Consequently, the intellect is not knowable or intelligible directly through itself, but only becomes knowable after being actualized by a species. It is

<sup>23</sup> "Quantum igitur ad actualem cognitionem, qua aliquis considerat se in actu animam habere, sic dico, quod anima cognoscitur per actus suos. In hoc enim aliquis percipit se animam habere, et vivere, et esse, quod percipit se sentire et intelligere, et alia huiusmodi vitae opera exercere" (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8).



through the species, therefore, that the soul actually knows itself. Aristotle leaves no doubt on this point.

b) *The habitual knowledge of the soul through itself.*—In order that the soul know itself by habitual knowledge, the intervention of a species is not necessary. This knowledge it can have from the mere fact that it is present to itself. St. Thomas expresses himself as follows: "Concerning habitual knowledge I say this, that the soul sees itself through its essence, that is, the soul has the power to enter upon actual knowledge (*actum cognitionis*) of itself from the very fact that its essence is present to it."<sup>24</sup> This knowledge, he explains, is comparable to possessing the habit of a science. One who possesses the habit of a science, a mathematician for example, can immediately and by his own efforts proceed to consider the things that fall under that science. Similarly, within the soul there lies whatever it needs to accomplish this knowledge of itself. As St. Thomas observes, "The essence of the soul, which is present to the mind, is enough for this [i.e., for the perception of its existence and the activity within it], for the acts in which it is actually perceived proceed from it."<sup>25</sup>

So much for St. Thomas' statement on the matter. Even his statement, however, may not have satisfied all our queries. What, exactly, is the real import of this habitual knowledge enunciated by St. Thomas? One false impression should be dismissed at once. The habitual knowledge in question is not at all actual, and it is not conscious. It has nothing to do with

<sup>24</sup> "Quantum ad cognitionem habitualement, sic dico, quod anima per essentiam suam se videt, id est ex hoc ipso quod essentia sua est sibi praesens, est potens exire in actum cognitionis sui ipsius" (*ibid.*).

<sup>25</sup> "Ad hoc sufficit sola essentia animae, quae menti est praesens: ex ea enim actus progrediuntur, in quibus actualiter ipsa percipitur" (*ibid.*).

St. Thomas, however, does not mean to suggest that the habitual knowledge in question is a habit proper; in fact, he says explicitly it is not: "Ad hoc autem quod percipiat anima se esse, et quid in seipsa agatur attendat, non requiritur aliquis habitus, sed ad hoc . . ." Then follows the passage just quoted in this present note.

that ill-defined yet uninterrupted awareness of self that goes with all our conscious life. We are here simply at the highest level of the soul's being. There is no doubt that what St. Thomas has in mind is to accentuate the ultimate nature of the soul, showing that it is inherently capable of knowing itself in the way an angel, meaning a pure spirit, knows himself. Nor need this be cause for undying wonder. The human soul, let it be remembered, is spiritual through and through. As such, it is intelligible by its very nature. And since it is not only intelligible but also intelligent, in so far as it is intelligent it is clearly present to itself. In principle, therefore, the human soul by its very nature possesses whatever is necessary to credit it with an act of direct knowledge of itself.

Still, it may be asked why in the present life the human soul does not always actually know itself in this way; why, in other words, this latent capacity to know itself directly is not actually and continuously realized. The answer lies in the fact that in the present life its proper mode of knowing is abstractive; it now knows by turning to the phantasm, both to acquire the intelligible species by which at present it must be actualized, as well as to accomplish the act of knowledge after having been informed by the species. This circumstance bars direct knowledge of the soul. As for the reason why it must now turn to the phantasm, that is another question, not overlooked by St. Thomas, but falling beyond our immediate concern.

In its state of union with the body, therefore, the soul's habitual knowledge of itself is not constantly actualized. But is there ever an instance in this life when it is so actualized? Or—and this comes to the same thing—may we say that the actual knowledge mentioned earlier is a partial and acquired actualization of the habitual knowledge in question? To these points we find no explicit answers in St. Thomas; but his replies to several of the pro and con arguments preceding the

body of the article suggest that in his view the actual knowledge spoken of in the article is a sort of continuation of the habitual knowledge, at least in so far as it relates to the mere existence of the soul, and not to its essential nature. Thus, in one reply, commenting on St. Augustine's assertion that the soul knows itself through itself, he writes as follows: "We must understand these words of St. Augustine to mean that the mind knows itself through itself, since from itself the mind has the power to enter upon the act by which it actually knows itself, by perceiving that it exists."<sup>26</sup>

## 2. *Handling of the Problem in the Summa*

Reading St. Thomas' discussion of this same problem in the *Summa*,<sup>27</sup> one cannot but feel that here he is more reluctant, though not altogether unwilling, to concede anything to the Augustinian tradition. Here, in other words, the application of Aristotelian principles to the question at hand is more rigid. The conclusion arrived at in the body of the article is that the only knowledge the soul has of itself is through its acts. "Therefore," so runs his conclusion, "the intellect knows itself not by its essence, but by its act."<sup>28</sup> The reason on which this verdict is based we already know. A thing is knowable or intelligible in so far as it is in act. But with respect to the order of intelligible objects, our intellect is in pure potency. Hence the aforesaid determination. Having stated this, St. Thomas further notes, as in *De Veritate*, that the soul's self-knowledge is nevertheless twofold. It may be *particular* or experimental,

<sup>26</sup> "Dicendum, quod verbum Augustini est intelligendum quod mens seipsam per seipsam cognoscit, quod ex ipsa mente est ei unde possit in actum prodire, quo se actualiter cognoscat percipiendo se esse" (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8 ad 1 in contrarium).

Cf. Text XI, "The Knowledge of the Soul Through Itself," p. 274.

<sup>27</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 87, a. 1.

<sup>28</sup> "Non ergo per essentiam suam, sed per actum suum se cognoscit intellectus noster" (*ibid.*).



as when Socrates perceives he has an intellectual soul by perceiving that he understands. Or it may be *universal* and scientific, as when we learn the nature of the human intellect from knowledge of the intellectual act.

After going through the article in the *Summa* one naturally wonders whether here all habitual and direct knowledge of the soul has been definitely eliminated. The text itself seems to indicate that it has not been ruled out. If one studies carefully what St. Thomas says about the particular knowledge which the soul has of itself, it will be seen that the adequate basis for this, as for habitual knowledge, is the mere presence of the soul to itself. "The mere presence of the mind," observes St. Thomas, "suffices for the first [*i.e.*, particular knowledge]." <sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the term of knowledge is the same in both cases; in particular knowledge as in habitual knowledge, what one knows is the existence of the soul and its activities, not its essential nature. The individual perceives that he has an intellectual soul whenever he takes note of his intelligent activity. "Socrates or Plato," writes St. Thomas, meaning anyone, "perceives that he has an intellectual soul because he perceives that he understands (*intelligere*)." <sup>30</sup> Thus the instrumentality of the act of the intellect is always required, but once again the ultimate ground for this particular awareness of self would seem to be that intelligible presence of the soul to itself which is conveyed in the notion of habitual knowledge.

### 3. The Case of the Separated Soul

In its present condition, which is that of union with the body, the intellectual soul is largely cloaked in obscurity. This is particularly true of its ultimate reality, the core of its being.

<sup>29</sup> "Nam ad primam cognitionem de mente habendam sufficit ipsa mentis praesentia" (*ibid.*).

<sup>30</sup> "Socrates vel Plato percipit se habere animam intellectivam ex hoc quod percipit se intelligere" (*ibid.*).

To find some way of portraying the soul in its separated condition would therefore be a most welcome as well as enlightening experience. St. Thomas, with all the forthrightness of the metaphysician that he is, does not shrink from contriving a theoretical conception of the separated soul's manner and being.<sup>31</sup> What he says on this subject will give us further insight into the nature of our intellectual activity.

At the very outset, this inquiry poses a dilemma regarding the union of body and soul. If we accept the view of the Platonists that the soul's union with the body is not substantial but accidental, then separation is its natural state, and the problem of its manner of knowing apart from the body does not exist. For, on that supposition death simply means that the soul is released to its natural condition of a pure spirit, inherently and immediately prepared, like any such spirit, to know intelligible objects without benefit of phantasms. But this solution merely creates another problem for which it has no answer. What, in other words, would be the reason for union of body and soul if this union, far from working to the good of the soul, only redounded to its embarrassment? On the other hand, if this union is natural and for the good of the soul inasmuch as the body makes possible the procurement of phantasms without which knowledge is impossible, naturally speaking it would seem that after death the soul, having no body, is incapable of knowing anything at all.

St. Thomas circumvents this dilemma by saying that there are two modes of understanding for the soul, corresponding to its two different modes of existing, one in union with the body and the other in separation from it. United with the body, the intellectual soul knows by turning to phantasms; disjoined, it knows in the manner of pure spirits, that is, by turning to objects that are by nature actually intelligible (*intelligibilia simpliciter*). But he hastens to add—and this is the real point he wants to

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 89, a. 1.

make—that the soul's mode of knowing when united with the body, like its mode of existing in the body, is the *natural* one, whereas the other is *preternatural*. "It is natural for the soul," he declares, "to understand by turning to the phantasms as it is for it to be joined to the body; but to be separated from the body is not in accordance with its nature (*praeter rationem suae naturae*), and likewise to understand without turning to the phantasms is not natural to it (*praeter naturam*)."<sup>32</sup>

In the mind of St. Thomas, therefore, there is no doubt that the best (natural) condition for man is to be united with the body, possessing the kind of activity that accords with this union. But St. Thomas is not unmindful that to this conclusion another objection can be raised. If, as we have said, the soul is fundamentally capable of knowing in the manner of pure spirits, what possible advantage is there to its having to resort to an inferior mode of knowing, since to know by turning to objects intelligible by nature is better than to know by turning to phantasms?

St. Thomas disposes of this objection by explaining that the human soul, being lowest in the order of intellectual substances, could not acquire precise and distinct knowledge of things if its only manner of knowing were that which is proper to higher spiritual substances. "While it is true," he notes, "that it is nobler in itself to understand by turning to something higher than to understand by turning to phantasms, nevertheless such a mode of understanding was not so perfect as regards what was possible to the soul. . . . Therefore to make it possible for human souls to possess perfect and proper knowledge, they were so made that their nature required them to be joined to bodies."<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, the reason why it was good for the soul to require a body was to enable it to gain proper and adequate knowledge of sensible things, which clear knowledge of such

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



things it, unlike higher spiritual substances, could not acquire without the sensible media of images. And with these remarks we have reached what appears to be St. Thomas the philosopher's<sup>34</sup> last word on the union of body and soul and its bearing on the activity of man as man.<sup>35</sup>

### III. CONCLUSIONS AND COROLLARIES

#### 1. *Summary of the Doctrine of St. Thomas*

a) *The soul's knowledge of itself.*—In the present life our natural condition is that of an incarnate spirit, whose deepest roots, however, are those of a pure spirit. As incarnate spirit, our soul knows itself through its acts, that is, through intelligible species, *per species*; but in its capacity of a pure spirit it is objectively (that is, knowably) and immediately present to the intellect. This is the meaning of the soul's habitual knowledge of itself as set forth in *De Veritate*. As soon as, or whenever, an act of abstractive knowledge comes to pass, the intellectual soul apprehends itself immediately, perceiving, not its essential nature, but its existence inasmuch as it understands itself to be the principle of the knowledge at hand. There is every reason to believe that in this becoming aware of itself the soul experiences a partial realization of that primordial capacity to know itself through itself which St. Thomas calls habitual knowledge. Basically, then, it would be as a pure spirit that the soul becomes aware of itself. As soon as its ties with the body are broken, the soul itself becomes its immediate and proper object of knowledge; and then its preternatural condition as an actual spirit, separate and subsistent, is fully revealed.

<sup>34</sup> The text says, "St. Thomas the *philosopher*" advisedly, as St. Thomas is here speaking of the separated soul's "natural" knowledge, not of its supernatural knowledge. In fact, he is careful to note that "the knowledge of glory is otherwise—*de cognitione autem glorie est alia ratio*" (*Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 89, a. 2)—Translator's note.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Text XII, "The Separated Soul's Knowledge," p. 277.

Such, in our opinion, are the broad outlines that should guide us in interpreting St. Thomas' doctrine of the knowledge of the soul through itself.

b) *The extent of the soul's knowledge of itself.*—It is apparent that in apprehending our existence we also apprehend the activity of our inner faculties of will and intellect. But does this awareness go so far as to include the faculties themselves? St. Thomas makes his position clear.<sup>36</sup> As in the case of the soul itself, all that can be apprehended immediately of the faculty is its existence and not its essential nature. I am conscious of thinking and willing, and this awareness includes the existence of the faculties involved. But the real nature of intellect and will, like that of the soul itself, is not brought to light by this sort of knowledge. That must come by diligent study, meaning the science of psychology in all its breadth and depth.

Intellect and will are spiritual faculties, exercising spiritual activities. But we also have sensory faculties and activities. Is their existence included in the awareness that the soul has of itself? To be sure, the operations of sense are not present to the spiritual soul on precisely the same ground (that is, not so nearly) as the operations of the spiritual faculties of intellect and will. Nevertheless, there is no doubt—St. Thomas explicitly acknowledges the fact—that we perceive ourselves to be the principle not only of intellectual but also of sensitive activity. The soul, in other words, is aware of its sensory perceptions: *percipit anima se sentire*.

Here again we are reminded of the real unity of man's nature. Our sensory activity is rooted in the same self as our spiritual activity. The "I" or the self that senses is also the "I" that thinks. The inner, that is, the essential nature of our sensitive life may not be directly perceived, but there can be no denying that the fact and the principle of this life are apprehended, reflectively, by the intellect. What is more, psychologically

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 87, a. 2.

speaking it is only on the basis of such reflective or intellectual awareness that we can have a self at all. For, to speak truly, only in so far as it enters the precincts of intellectual awareness does our sensory (and infrasensory) life become really "ours."

## 2. *Comparison of the Intuition of Self in St. Thomas and Modern Philosophy*

Further light may be shed on St. Thomas' doctrine of the intuition of self by comparing it with some views of more recent vogue. Ever since Descartes there has been an almost uniform tendency to give reflective knowledge the preponderant role in the order of knowledge. In consequence of this trend of thought the self and its activities soon came to be taken as the special, and indeed as the immediate and primary object of the human mind. In such a view, of course, the external object could no longer be known directly, but only in after-thought, as it were, which is to say mediately and inferentially. The eventual, indeed the inevitable outcome of this way of thinking was the complete identification of the object of knowledge with consciousness itself.

With respect to the elimination of the external thing as the immediate object of knowledge, the three great French systems of thought mentioned earlier are at one, there being little to choose between the clear and distinct idea of Descartes, the primitive fact of Maine de Biran, and the immediate data of consciousness put forward by Bergson. In the one case the self or ego is reduced to a thinking substance, in the other to deliberate conative effort, and in the third to pure duration. But in all of them the immediate knowledge of the intellect stops short of the external object, coming to halt at an object interior to consciousness. In German idealism the first principle or starting point of knowledge is still the self, reflectively apprehended; but here it loses all semblance of substantiality, even



where it is grounded in a subject, as the subject itself is held to be in constant flux, having no abiding identity. So understood, the self is nothing more than the first and unconditioned positing (thesis) of an act of the mind.

St. Thomas, following Aristotle, takes a different course. For him, as we have repeatedly said, the proper object of the human intellect lies in the material thing, exterior to the mind. In this view, much more moderate than the preceding ones, the particular problem is to find a satisfactory explanation for the assimilation by the mind of an object so different from itself. But the Aristotelian doctrine has the untold advantage of being more in harmony with the facts in the matter. Both Aristotle and St. Thomas insist that human understanding is in the first instance turned outward, grasping something other than itself. But it is also capable of turning inward; for intellectual activity is immanent, and it is also reflective. More profoundly, there resides within us the wherewithal for existing and understanding in the manner of a pure spirit. When that condition shall have come to pass, the self will become the immediate and direct object of our thought. In our present condition, however, this sort of understanding is not possible except, as we have seen, on that greatly reduced scale implied in the soul's habitual knowledge of itself. In the state of separation, when soul is no longer united to body, our whole understanding will be in the manner of a pure spirit, yet still imperfectly so, not reaching the perfection of the higher spirits. All in all, then, the doctrine that holds the self to be the original and precedent object of awareness is not without some foundation. The doctrine of St. Thomas, however, while less pretentious, is more comprehensive and objective, that is, accordant with stubborn reality.

## APPENDIX

*The Knowledge of Higher (Spiritual) Realities*

In his comprehensive treatment of human intellectual knowledge in the *Summa*, St. Thomas classifies this knowledge according to the gradation of objects which it can consider. These objects are of three general kinds: material things, which are below the intellect in the order of being; the soul itself, which is on the same level; and spiritual substances, which are above it. We have already discussed the knowledge of material things and of the soul itself. Still to be considered, though briefly—since this is not the place for its detailed discussion—is the problem of man's knowledge of spiritual beings. St. Thomas notes two instances of such knowledge, one relating to the angels, the other to God.

a) *Man's knowledge of the angels.*—In the *Summa* St. Thomas devotes two articles to this particular point.<sup>37</sup> Much of his discussion in these articles deals with the opinions of certain commentators, especially those of Averroes and Avempace, according to whom man's blessedness consists in knowing the separate substances. These opinions do not concern us here. As for St. Thomas' own teaching, it may be summed up in two principal items: 1) that in its present state the human intellect cannot know immaterial substances in themselves (*secundum seipsas*); and 2) that by analogy with material things it can gain some knowledge of their nature, but this knowledge is indirect and imperfect.

These conclusions will be readily admitted by those who accept the over-all theory of knowledge taught by Aristotle and St. Thomas. But whether or not we accept this theory, experience itself testifies that we have no immediate and direct knowledge of spirits. As for the manner of knowledge and communica-

<sup>37</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 88, aa. 1, 2.

tion among pure spirits themselves, St. Thomas discusses that question in his treatise on the angels, reaching definite conclusions of his own. But what he says about it does not apply specifically to the human soul in its present state of union with the body, and so we need not press the matter further.

b) *Man's knowledge of God.*<sup>38</sup>—If in its present state our intellect is unable to have a proper knowledge of created spiritual substances, all the greater is its inability to acquire a proper and direct knowledge of God. To repeat a previous assertion, the human intellect is not the faculty of the divine; its direct and proper object is not God. Still, the human intellect by its own resources can come to some knowledge of God. From the knowledge of sensible things His existence can be known. Also, by analogy and, as the theologians say, by way of negation and eminence (*via remotionis et eminentiae*) we can gain some knowledge, however imperfect, of His nature and perfections. It is for the metaphysician to treat of these matters at length and in detail. Suffice it to have noted that even for the human intellect as now constituted, there exists an avenue of approach to these higher realities.

### Part Three: Conclusion. Historical and Doctrinal Position of St. Thomas' Theory of Intellectual Knowledge

At the risk of some repetition we shall conclude our entire discussion of St. Thomas' doctrine of intellectual knowledge with a further summary of its general character and achievement, noting first its principal sources and the advances made by St. Thomas, and then comparing it with the approach of modern philosophy to the same problem.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 3.



### 1. *Philosophical Origins of the Thomistic Doctrine*

a) There is no disputing that in the main St. Thomas endorses the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, considering it as a *via media* between the utter sensism of Democritus and the Platonic theory of ideas. Of these two extreme views, moreover, it was the latter especially which circumstances conspired to single out for his attention and adjudication.

For all that, however, St. Thomas could not ignore whatever had been said and thought on the subject since Aristotle. Confronting him were, besides the Aristotelian doctrine, two other important sources of philosophical speculation. One of these was the Augustinian tradition, of which he made some modified borrowings. Among the most noteworthy adoptions are his assimilation of the Augustinian notion of knowledge through the eternal reasons (*rationes aeternae*) and his incorporation, in amended form, of the principle that the soul knows itself through itself. In the hands of St. Thomas these notions are skillfully integrated with the Aristotelian scheme of knowledge, to which in turn they lend increased depth and dimension. Alongside of the Augustinian theory of knowledge, moreover, St. Thomas found certain Arabian doctrines, the most notable being that of the separate intellect. Concerning this particular doctrine there could be no *rapprochement*, only outright repudiation.

b) Despite its close kinship with the Aristotelian tradition and with certain elements of St. Augustine's thought, St. Thomas' doctrine of knowledge displays strong characteristics of its own. And if, as is true, it is more Aristotelian than anything else, the end product is an Aristotelianism carried to new heights and prominence. We cannot detail all the points improved upon by St. Thomas. Significant, for example, are his contributions to the concept of immateriality and to such matters as the object of the intellect, the active aspect of the intel-

lectual process, the mental word, and the soul's knowledge of itself. In all these questions Aristotle is materially surpassed.

Not less notable for enlarging our understanding of the nature of intellect is his teaching on angelic and divine knowledge, the product in large measure of his own creative thought. Here we are introduced into every realm of spiritual being, comprising every order of intellect, from our own which is lowest, to the highest which is God. This hierarchical conception of intellect is as impressive as it is comprehensive, and one is not surprised to find St. Thomas applying himself to it with obvious liking. For, here lay a challenge suiting his genius, the genius of a man who, better than all others, knew how to reduce great questions to order and unity.

## *2. The Thomistic Doctrine Compared with the Modern Approach*

a) In modern philosophy the most typical approach to the problem of knowledge is, without a doubt, idealism, meaning subjectivism. In its modern dress idealism goes back to Descartes; he laid its foundations, insisting that the immediate and primary object of the intellect is the thinking self. After him it grew by leaps and bounds, its growth outdone only by its unending variety. In Kant it still lacks complete fulfillment, since he retains a transcendent reality over and above the world of phenomena. But this distinction is done away with by his successors. With them, idealism reaches its ultimate and logical term, becoming a philosophy of pure immanence, where all knowledge is self-knowledge. Thus idealism, beginning with an impassable barrier between subject and object, ends with an impossible identity of subject and object.

The ground roots of idealism, however, are older than Descartes. They may be traced to that irreparable cleavage between sensory and intellectual knowledge, between objects of sense and objects beyond sense, which Plato had been the first to

infect. Plato, it is true, admitted that in the beginning our knowledge is of sensible things; but these are constantly changing and subject to endless variation. Consequently, they cannot satisfy our intellect, which seeks what is unchanging and abiding. The mind, therefore, cannot find its proper object in the material world. Freed from all outside dependence, it is self-sufficient, its object being itself, or at least within itself.

b) It was this extreme partitioning of sensible and intelligible object to which Aristotle and his followers took particular exception in Plato's doctrine. Their position is that the necessary and the changeable object, the object of sense and the object of intellect, are received one with the other by the knower, both deriving from the same external reality. Nor is this a matter of mere choice with them, since the facts of experience itself bear witness—*magis experimur*, says St. Thomas<sup>39</sup>—that the intellect receives its object from sensible things.

This view of knowledge may well offer some difficulties not encountered in the idealist account, all the elements of which seem to fall in place at once. But what the Aristotelian explanation forfeits in simplicity it more than gains in credibility, attending as it does to all the factors involved, to body as well as soul, to matter and spirit. Better than any other, therefore, the Aristotelian doctrine pictures man as he is: the point of convergence for two worlds, the world of spirit and of matter.

<sup>39</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 88, a. 1.



## † CHAPTER 9

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# The Will

### I. THE MEANING OF WILL

† KNOWING and willing (or desiring) are the two great components of conscious life. To know and to experience the attraction of one thing or another, in one way or another, such as by love, desire, joy, and like promptings—these are the most typical manifestations of conscious activity.

In the chapter on the sensitive soul<sup>1</sup> we had occasion to offer preliminary remarks on the nature of appetite, specifically of sense appetite. A brief restatement of some of our earlier findings will stand us in good stead at this point.

a) *General divisions of appetite*.—In his treatment of appetite (including will) in the *Summa*,<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas builds the whole discussion around one basic principle of action, the metaphysical principle that every form gives rise to an inclination: *quamlibet formam sequitur aliqua inclinatio*.

Accordingly, from their natural form nonknowing beings have a natural inclination or appetite: *appetitus naturalis*. Knowing

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 4, Part Two: The Sensitive Appetite and the Locomotive Potency.

<sup>2</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, qq. 80–83.

beings, on the other hand, also have an appetite that follows in the wake of an apprehended form. This is called animal or, more precisely, elicited appetite: *appetitus elicitus*, the term "elicited" referring to the fact that the movement of this appetite involves the actuation of a potency.

More particularly, every appetitive faculty itself has a natural appetite corresponding to its nature as a faculty, and an elicited appetite corresponding, not to its natural form, but to a form apprehended by sense or intellect, as the case may be.

b) *Existence and nature of will.*—The existence of a spiritual faculty of appetition distinct from sensory faculties of appetition is an immediate deduction from the principle that every form gives rise to an inclination. Since there are two basic kinds of faculties of knowledge, sense and intellect, there are, in consequence, two basic kinds of appetitive potencies, the one sensory, following upon sense knowledge, the other spiritual, which is the will and follows upon intellectual knowledge. In the *Contra Gentiles* St. Thomas presents the argument for the existence of will as follows:

In every intellectual nature there is a will. For, the intellect is actuated by an intelligible form, inasmuch as it actually understands, even as a natural thing acquires the actuality of natural being by its own form. Now, a natural thing, by the form that perfects it in its species, has an inclination to its proper operations, and to the proper end to which it attains by its operation, since such as a thing is, such is its operation, and such the end to which it tends. Hence from the intelligible form there results in the intelligent being an inclination to its proper operations and end. This inclination of the intellectual nature is the will, which is the principle of those operations that are in our power, and whereby the intellect operates for the sake of an end, because the end and the good are the object of the will. Consequently in every intelligent being there is a will.<sup>3</sup>

It may be objected that to be known is something accidental to the desired thing, not affecting its essential nature; con-

<sup>3</sup> *Contra Gentiles*, IV, 19.

sequently, even though to know it by sense and intellect is to know it in different ways, this distinction is not enough to be the basis for distinct potencies of appetite. St. Thomas replies that from the standpoint of the thing being desirable, it is not at all accidental whether it be known or not. On the contrary, only and in so far as the thing is known does it call forth the movement of the appetite; and since to be known by sense and intellect is to be known according to essentially different aspects, this difference provides adequate ground for distinct potencies. The faculties of sense apprehend the thing as a particular good, whereas the intellect knows it according to the universal aspect of good. Consequently, even though the will desires things that can only exist as material singulars, and so are knowable by sense as well as intellect, it desires them according to the universal aspect of good. Hence, like the intellect, the will is a faculty, not of the singular, but rather of the universal. Besides, the will, observes St. Thomas, can also desire immaterial goods, such as knowledge, virtue, and other things of this sort. These, sense does not apprehend at all.<sup>4</sup>

Being a faculty of the universal, the will is a spiritual potency. For this reason also it is a single faculty. Sensitive appetite, it will be recalled, comprises two distinct faculties, the distinction coming from the manner in which the good in question is apprehended by sense: whether as easy or difficult of attainment. To this difference in the object correspond respectively the concupiscible and the irascible appetite. The object of the will, on the other hand, being universal in scope, takes in both these aspects; hence there is no ground for a comparable diversification of potencies within the intellectual appetite. By the same reasoning it is one will that seeks both the end (*bonum honestum*) and the means (*bonum utile*), and the same will that rejoices in the good (*bonum delectabile*) when attained.<sup>5</sup>

c) *Manner of presence of the thing loved in the lover.*—

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 80, a. 2 ad 1, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 82, a. 5.



From one point of view the existence of voluntary inclination, or will, poses something of a difficulty calling for explanation. In general, before a potency can be in act in regard to its object, a union must be established with the object that determines or actuates the potency. In the case of knowledge the potency is specified, or reduced to act, through a likeness (species) that causes the object to be present in the faculty itself.

This state of affairs is hardly admissible for the will, since the movement of the will in desiring is toward the thing, which is desired in so far as it exists outside the will. Accordingly, to propose a likeness (species) of the object in the will would seem to be leveling down, unduly, the real difference between the appetitive faculties and the faculties of knowledge. Strictly speaking, therefore—and this is the view of St. Thomas—we cannot say that there is a likeness or similitude of the object in the appetitive potency; nevertheless, there is in the will a sort of affective accommodation (*coaptatio*) to the object, brought about by the initial movement of the faculty, which is love. Thus, when I perceive an object that pleases me, I begin to love it. Through this love my will is in some way conformed to the object, causing the object to be effectively present in me. On this point St. Thomas writes as follows:

That which is loved is not only in the intellect of the lover, but also in his will; yet not in the same way. For it is in his intellect by its specific likeness; whereas it is in his will as the term of a movement is in its proportionate motive principle, by reason of the proportion and aptitude of the principle to that term. Thus, in a sense, the higher place is in the flame, because fire is volatile, and consequently is proportionate and apt for such a place.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "Sic igitur quod amatur non solum est in intellectu amantis, sed etiam in voluntate ipsius; aliter tamen et aliter. In intellectu enim est secundum similitudinem suae speciei; in voluntate autem amantis est sicut terminus motus in principio motivo proportionato per convenientiam et proportionem quam habet ad ipsum; sicut in igne quodammodo est locus sursum, ratione levitatis, secundum quam habet proportionem et convenientiam ad talem locum" (*Contra Gentiles*, IV, 19).

Briefly, things compassed by the spiritual faculties of the soul are present in two ways: by vital assimilation in the intellect, by affective accommodation in the will, designating respectively the specific character of the activity of each.<sup>7</sup>

d) *The acts of the will.*—The sole appetitive faculty in the spiritual order, the will, as experience itself proclaims, is the source of a great variety of acts, such as love, desire, choice, joy, and others. In the moral portions of his writings<sup>8</sup> St. Thomas analyzes and classifies these acts within the framework of rational activity, such a procedure being in keeping with the principle that each individual movement of the rational appetite arises from and is governed by an act of rational knowledge. Accordingly, we find in the integral human act a parallel series of steps, six in all, one series pertaining to the intellect, the other to the will. We shall briefly set forth the steps relating to the will, leaving the further study of the human act to moral philosophy.

First of all, with regard to the end or goal in view, the will may experience a mere wish (*simplex volitio*), which is nothing more than a natural complacency in the good that happens to be present to the mind. This step is followed by intention (*intentio*), which is the active or efficacious desiring of the good in question. The next two steps have to do with the means to the end. Here the will first consents (*consensus*) to a consideration of the various means by which the desired good can be obtained, and then it chooses (*electio*) one of the means. The last two steps concern the execution of the act, in which the will brings into operation (*usus activus*) the other faculties that are necessary to complete the act decided on. Then, the end having

Wish }  
Intention }  
Consent to }  
consider }  
choice }  
operation }  
enjoyment }

<sup>7</sup> This matter of accommodation of the appetite to the object loved is discussed at length by theologians in connection with the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit. The interested reader, who will find his efforts well repaid, is referred especially to John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Theologicus*, IV, disp. xii, a. 7.

<sup>8</sup> See in particular *Summa theol.*, Ia IIae, qq. 11–17.

been gained, the will experiences enjoyment (*fruitio*) in the good now possessed.

These, in outline, are the successive moments that occur—note, however, that the will may stop at any one of them—in the activity of the will as it brings the human act to completion in its integral whole. Though greatly simplified, this sketch is enough to convey something of the fine discernment and unimpeachable analysis that mark St. Thomas' study of the appetitive side of human life.

## II. THE WILL AND THE OTHER FACULTIES OF THE SOUL

It need hardly be said, so evident is the fact, that the will lies at the very heart of our conscious activity. The will, therefore, influences our other faculties in many ways. Two questions in particular deserve some attention, the first regarding the superiority of intellect over will, the second relating to the manner in which the will moves the other faculties.

### 1. *Superiority of Intellect over Will*

Intellect and will are conjoined and, in certain respects, complementary faculties, acting reciprocally upon each other. We shall speak later of this mutual dependence. At the moment we want to see by what arguments St. Thomas establishes the priority between these two faculties.<sup>9</sup>

a) *Reasons in favor of the primacy of will*.—Offhand, one might expect that the will ought to be superior to the intellect, the reasons being the following. 1) The rank of a faculty, so it would seem, is determined by its object. But the object of the will is the good, which designates a thing according to the fullness of its perfection, including in particular its ultimate act or perfection: existence. Thus the object of the will appears to be more perfect than the more abstract object of the intellect,

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 82, a. 3; *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 11.



which is the true. 2) Since it moves the intellect, the will is seemingly master of it, the more so that the object of the will, which is the good or the end, is first and foremost among the causes. 3) A supernatural argument for the pre-eminence of will can be formulated from St. Paul's teaching that the most perfect habit or virtue is charity, which resides in the will: *major autem horum est caritas*. Between habits and the potencies they perfect, however, there must be correspondence. Presumably, then, the will, the seat of charity, cannot but be the highest faculty.

b) *Reasons in favor of the primacy of intellect*.<sup>10</sup>—Despite the aforesaid arguments, St. Thomas insists that, absolutely speaking, the intellect is superior to the will. His reasoning may be summed up in the following statements. 1) The more simple and the more abstract a thing, the nobler and higher it is in itself: *quanto autem aliquid est simplicius et abstractius, tanto secundum se est nobilius et altius*. 2) The object of the intellect is more simple and more absolute than the object of the will: *objectum enim intellectus est simplicius et magis absolutum quam objectum voluntatis*.

The first of these statements is merely an application of the general principle that immateriality is the root or foundation of knowledge. The more immaterial the mode of being of the object of a faculty, the more actual and more perfect the object, and, correspondingly, the more removed from matter and so the more perfect is the potency related to the object. The second statement is an illustration of the first. It implies that the intellect is higher than the will because of the difference in their respective objects. The object of the intellect, which is the quiddity or essence of things, does not include concrete existence; whereas the object of the will, which is the good, en-

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the references in note 9, the reader may also consult Cajetan, *In Iam Partem*, q. 82, a. 3, and John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Philosophicus*, IV Pars, q. 12, a. 5 (ed. Reiser, III, 403 ff.).

compasses a thing in all its concrete reality. Consequently, the former is more abstract and more immaterial than the latter; and these conditions, according to the first of the two statements under consideration, render the object of the intellect, and therefore the intellect itself, more noble and higher.

In *De Veritate* <sup>11</sup> St. Thomas invokes another reason, one that concerns the manner in which the intellect and the will attain their object. The intellect, observes St. Thomas, takes possession of its object in more intimate fashion; therefore, the faculty of knowledge is superior. What I know, in other words, is present in the faculty of knowledge through the species of the thing, but what I desire is not similarly present in the will, since I desire it in the existence it has in itself. But to be in possession of the excellence of a thing is more perfect than to be properly disposed to this thing as it exists outside oneself.<sup>12</sup> In brief, absolutely speaking, cognitive assimilation by the faculty of knowledge is more perfect than effective union through the will.

St. Thomas' reasoning on this point is not merely an *ad hoc* tactic. In his treatise on beatitude he carries his logic to its ultimate conclusion in declaring that our supreme happiness formally consists not in an act of the will, nor in fruition by the will—this being a result of happiness—but in the knowledge or vision of God. Nevertheless, the delight of the will is a necessary and essential accompaniment of the act by which the faculty of knowledge, the intellect, comes in possession of our ultimate end.<sup>13</sup>

Among medieval Scholastics and the commentators of succeeding ages this question of priority between intellect and will provided the material for a great many discussions, which

<sup>11</sup> Q. 22, a. 11.

<sup>12</sup> "Perfectius autem est, simpliciter et absolute loquendo, habere in se nobilitatem alterius rei, quam ad rem nobilem comparari extra se existentem" (*ibid.*).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia IIae, q. 3, a. 4.

it would take far too long to examine. In general, however, the Scotist school maintains the superiority of the will, and many others agree with them. Be that as it may, the Thomistic arguments to the contrary rest on metaphysical ground that is unassailable. There is no denying, either, that in arguing for the pre-eminence of the intellect St. Thomas was again taking his stand with Aristotle, who in his inquiry regarding the highest happiness leaves no doubt that according to him the primacy belongs to knowledge,<sup>14</sup> and that pleasure or delight is an outcome of knowledge, supervening upon the act of contemplation, "like the fairness of youth on those in the flower of life."<sup>15</sup>

c) *Relative superiority of the will*.—Absolutely speaking, we have said, the intellect excels the will. There is, however, one general circumstance in which the opposite holds true, when, in other words, to will an object is better than to know it. This happens if the object in question is higher in the order of being than the intellect. Practically speaking, this condition prevails for all objects whose excellence surpasses that of the soul itself; and it applies most of all to God. In this life, therefore, the primacy belongs to charity. St. Thomas sums up his position as follows: "The love of God is better than the knowledge of God; but, on the contrary, the knowledge of corporeal things is better than the love thereof. Absolutely speaking, however, the intellect is nobler than the will."<sup>16</sup> In this passage, let it be noted, St. Thomas is speaking of the present condition of man. In the beatific vision it will again be more perfect to know than to love.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, especially 7, 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 1174 b 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 82, a. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Text XIII, "Superiority of Intellect over Will," p. 284.



## 2. How the Will Moves the Other Powers of the Soul

In the order of specification,<sup>18</sup> which means with respect to its object, the will is determined by, or depends on, the intellect, since only what is known can be willed: *nil volitum nisi praecognitum*. In the order of efficient causality, however, which is the order of exercise, it is the will that moves the intellect and, more generally, all other powers of the soul, excepting the vegetative, which are not directly subject to it.<sup>19</sup> The reason why the will is mover of the other faculties lies in the nature of its object. As St. Thomas explains, whenever a number of potencies are interrelated, the one whose object is the universal good has the role of mover in regard to potencies whose respective object is a particular good. St. Thomas compares this role of the will to the office of a king, whose concern is to secure the good of the whole kingdom, and who by his orders moves lesser officeholders placed in charge of particular regions of the realm. Similarly, the object of the will is not a particular good, but the good or the end universally, whereas other faculties are directed each toward the particular good proper to it. Therefore the will, concludes St. Thomas, moves the other powers of the soul; a conclusion, moreover, that is borne out by experience.

However, the will does not move all powers of the soul with the same immediacy. Its first and most immediate action bears on the intellect and its activity. Compared with universal good, the object of the intellect, the true, is only a particular good. Hence the will can put the intellect to use for its own purposes. As noted earlier, this is what happens in the human act when, moved by the will's intention of the end, the intellect seeks the

<sup>18</sup> For further explanation of *specification* and *exercise* with reference to the will, see below, p. 214.

<sup>19</sup> On the question of the will moving the intellect and the other faculties of the soul, see *Summa theol.*, Ia, q.82, a.4.

means by which the end can be obtained, deliberates about the means available, and finally decides which is preferable.

Thereupon, in concurrence with the imperative judgment of the intellect (the *imperium*), the will sets in motion the other powers of the soul whose instrumentality may be required to complete a given action. These powers are the faculties of sense knowledge, sense appetite, and locomotion. The will's control over these faculties, however, is not absolute: they can also be influenced by other factors. For example, the internal as well as the external senses, and the passions of the soul, may be stimulated and otherwise affected by bodily conditions. Over these, therefore, the will has only political (or qualified) control as compared with despotic (or absolute) dominion.

As a matter of fact, among the elements of behavior falling within the scope of voluntary activity, most difficult to assess from the moral point of view are the movements of passion and emotion, which have a strong bodily resonance. Being sensory in character, such experiences cannot reside in the will itself, although the will can and does harbor sentiments that are purely spiritual, such as the love of God or the ardent desire of truth. Nevertheless, even as intellectual activity is intimately related to the activity of sense knowledge, so is the activity of the will, even in its highest form, in closest association with the well-springs of those sensory responses that sprout into feelings or swell into emotions. Indeed, not the least task of the moralist consists in explaining how these two faculties of different orders, will and sensitive appetite, react upon each other, and how this reciprocal attraction influences human conduct. Our only purpose here has been to call attention, once more, to the fact that while for purposes of study we may carefully separate the powers of the soul and their activities, we must never forget that in the concrete all these powers and activities are knit together in closest union, stemming from and stirring, all of them, in one and the same living subject.

## III. FREE WILL

1. *The Psychological Notion of Freedom*

Since *freedom* is a word that has many greatly different meanings, it is important to make clear just what we mean by it in the present discussion.

a) *External freedom and internal freedom.*—In its most general sense a free act is one that is done without constraint: I am free to do something because nothing compels me to it. Compulsion, moreover, can bear both on the external act and on the internal act of willing itself.

To the absence of external coercion corresponds freedom of external action, which is variously named according to the kind of activity involved. Thus, we have *physical* freedom when we have the power to move about freely to a degree that is not enjoyed, say, by a prison inmate; *civil* freedom when we possess the right or power to act according to our wishes within the framework of society; *political* freedom when we enjoy the right to take part, pursuant to constitutional provisions, in the government of a state or nation; and freedom of *conscience* when we may express our convictions in public.

To the absence of internal coercion corresponds psychological freedom or the inner power to will freely. This is freedom in the basic sense. It means that the will has the power to determine whether it will act or not act, as well as the power to will one thing or to will another.

External freedom is contingent on internal freedom, since the first has no meaning without the second. But the converse is not necessarily true. Even though I should be deprived of my external freedoms, the freedom of my will remains—supposing, of course, that I am not also bereft, temporarily or permanently, of my reason. In the discussion to follow only this inner or psychological freedom is under consideration.



b) *Spontaneity and freedom*.—We have just said that free will is not identical with the mere absence of external compulsion. We must further observe that it is not altogether interchangeable with the power of spontaneous activity, which, in a way, comes from within the subject. Doubtless, one of the distinguishing marks of a free act is its spontaneity; its principle or source is not from without but from within the agent. The free act originates from myself. All this is perfectly true, but the fact remains that spontaneity and freedom are not equivalent terms: the one does not necessarily include the other. For a better understanding of the distinction, consider for a moment the various grades of beings whose activity can be called spontaneous.

First, it should be noted that some actions are completely devoid of spontaneity; these are called *violent*. They are imposed on a being from the outside and go against its natural inclination. In the view of the ancients, for example, lifting a stone is a “violent” action, since it is contrary to the downward pull which it is natural for a stone to exert. Such an action is in no way produced from within the thing that is moved.

Opposed to violent action is movement that proceeds from within, from the nature of a being. Even here, however, a distinction must be made, as both the natural movement of living and nonliving things proceeds from within, yet there is a great difference in their respective activities. *Inanimate* beings do indeed move themselves, if by self-movement we mean that their activity springs from and is governed by an inherent principle, which is their form or nature. But form and nature are received from another, once and for all, when a thing comes into being. In the order of action, therefore, inanimate beings are pure instruments, possessing self-movement or spontaneity in the qualified sense that their natural activity proceeds from an intrinsic principle.

Among living things, on the other hand, and especially among *animals*, spontaneous or self-movement reaches a much higher

degree. Since living beings are organic in nature, self-movement in them means that they are active and passive at once, one part acting on another. Their principle of movement, therefore, lies more completely within. This inherency is more pronounced in sentient than nonsentient beings, since the movement of animals *qua* animal results from sense knowledge, a higher immanent activity than vegetative life. For their sense impressions animals, to be sure, depend on something outside, but their reaction to these impressions hinges, in part at least, on their own evaluation of them, even though this evaluation is purely instinctive, and not reflective.

It is only in *beings endowed with reason* that spontaneous movement reaches the point where action is free in the strict sense of the word. The root of this freedom resides in the will's having dominion over the practical judgment on which its acts depend. Since the will controls this judgment, it can determine whether it will act or not act, and do this or do that.

Summing up, we may say that freedom of the will includes spontaneity of action, but spontaneity, like the absence of external coercion, is not enough to constitute free will.

c) *Necessary will and free will.*—Since the will can act freely, one might think that a free act is simply an act of the will, and vice versa. This would be true if the will never desired anything of necessity. There are, however, as St. Thomas is careful to point out, certain things regarding which the will is not free.<sup>20</sup> But not all necessity is of one kind; and it will help us to understand what is meant by necessary will if, with St. Thomas, we keep in mind the following classification of necessity:

1) *Natural or absolute necessity*, which follows from the nature of a thing. By the very nature of a triangle, for example, its three angles must equal two right angles.

2) *Necessity of the end*, which means that a given end necessitates a given means, if this happens to be the only means

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 82, aa. 1, 2.

Natural  
End  
External

of attaining the end. In this way nourishment is necessary for life.

3) Necessity that is imposed by an external agent, so that one is compelled from without. This is the necessity of coaction, and corresponds to violent action. *Violent*

The application of these distinctions to the will is readily made. As remarked earlier, necessity of coaction is utterly incompatible with will, since what is "violent" can be neither free nor according to nature. But the other two necessities have their place in the activity of the will. The will is moved by natural necessity, since it is necessarily attracted by the good in general, or the ultimate end. It is impossible for me not to want good as such, which is to say my happiness. In this respect the will is comparable to the intellect, which necessarily adheres to first principles. Furthermore, the will is moved by necessity of the end, which means that whenever the will desires something it necessarily desires the means without which this end cannot be attained. This necessity refers especially to those means without which the ultimate end is unobtainable, such as, according to St. Thomas, existence or life itself and the desire to see God. (The necessary desire to see God, however, presupposes the acquired conviction that happiness consists in the vision of God.)

Apart from things that are necessarily willed, there are countless others that do not move the will of necessity, because even without them it is possible to arrive at whatever end one may have in mind. Between them and the end there is no necessary connection. It is in this area that we find true psychological freedom, namely, within the realm of goods which are not necessarily associated with the end and which may, therefore, be willed or not willed.

## 2. *Existence and Nature of Free Will*

One of the perennial questions of philosophy is whether man is really free; whether, to use St. Thomas' phrasing of the prob-



lem, man has the power of free judgment (*liberum arbitrium*). Not a few philosophers have been of the opinion that man's will is not free. Setting their arguments aside for the moment, we shall first turn our attention to the reasons ordinarily given in favor of free will. The main ones are these three: <sup>(1)</sup> the testimony of consciousness, <sup>(2)</sup> the nature of the free act itself, and <sup>(3)</sup> the requirements of morality. The term "testimony of consciousness" lends itself to ambiguity, and, as a matter of fact, its full implication does not appear apart from a consideration of the nature of the free act itself. This explains why St. Thomas does not present these two proofs as distinct arguments. We shall follow his example.

a) *The requirements of morality.*—No free will, no morality! It would be easy to elaborate on this theme, which, so far as it goes, does constitute a most valuable argument. But whatever else may be said on this score, St. Thomas has given us the whole sum and substance of it in the following terse rejoinder: "I answer that man has free will: otherwise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would be in vain." <sup>21</sup> To this, nothing material could be added.

b) *The nature of the free act.*—The pivotal argument for free will, however, the one that stays all others, is based on the nature of the free act itself. Admittedly, it is conscious experience that reveals this act to us, but only when this experience is put through the crucible of metaphysical analysis does the testimony of consciousness become a decisive argument. Hence, also, the custom of referring to the present argument as the metaphysical proof, or the proof from the nature of the will.

For the basic explanation of the free act St. Thomas always appeals to the rational nature of man, particularly and more directly to his faculty of judgment. (Some beings act without the power of judgment; others, through the intervention of a judgment. (If the judgment is instinctive, not resulting from rational

<sup>21</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q.83, a.1.

insight, as in the case of brute animals, then there can be no freedom in the act. But if, as in the case of man, the judgment derives from deliberation and comparison instituted by reason, then the ensuing act is a product of free will. This power of free determination is possible because in contingent matters, in judgments that are not intrinsically necessary, reason may take any of several opposite courses. Since human actions have to do with particular matters, and since these matters as performable are contingent realities, man's reason can form various practical judgments concerning them, none of the judgments being determined or necessary. In short, the freedom of man's will is a necessary consequence of his rational nature. St. Thomas presents the argument as follows:

Man acts from judgment, because by his apprehensive power he judges that something should be avoided or sought. But, because this judgment in the case of some particular act, is not from a natural instinct, but from some act of comparison in the reason, therefore he acts from free judgment and retains the power of being inclined to various things. For reason in contingent matters may follow opposite courses. . . . Now particular operations are contingent, and therefore in such matters the judgment of reason may follow opposite courses, and is not determinate to one. And forasmuch as man is rational is it necessary that man have free will.<sup>22</sup>

With respect to the subject or agent, therefore, freedom has its source in reason; with respect to the object, it lies in the contingent or particular nature of the goods confronting the agent. In terms of the object we may, as St. Thomas often does, state

<sup>22</sup> "Sed homo agit iudicio, quia per vim cognoscitivam iudicat aliquid esse fugiendum vel prosequendum. Sed quia iudicium istud non est ex naturali instinctu in particulari operabili, sed ex collatione quadam rationis, ideo agit libero iudicio, potens in diversa ferri. Ratio enim circa contingentia habet viam ad opposita. . . . Particularia autem operabilia sunt quaedam contingentia; et ideo circa ea iudicium rationis ad diversa se habet, et non est determinatum ad unum. Et pro tanto necesse est quod homo sit liberi arbitrii, ex hoc ipso quod rationalis est" (*Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 83, a. 1).

the argument for free will as follows: In face of contingent or particular goods the will remains free; only the absolute or universal good necessarily moves it. These two proofs, moreover, the one from the object and the other from the rational nature of man, are complementary, since the human or free act is the product of the reciprocal application of intellect and will.

As for the experience or consciousness of freedom which is often invoked as an argument for free will, this refers specifically to the awareness of the nonnecessary character of the judgments on which my eventual decision rests. I may judge that a given means would be effective for the attainment of an end in view, and so I decide upon it; but at the same time I am aware that the reason or motive which prompts me to act is not irresistible, or compulsive. The good with which I am confronted is a contingent or particular good; therefore my choice cannot but be free. In a word, my consciousness of being a free agent is the consciousness of having a reason which judges and evaluates; it is not the feeling of an instinctive impulse coming, so to speak, from nowhere, as it is so often imagined.<sup>23</sup>

c) *Exercise and specification.*—The indetermination of the will may be approached from yet another point of view. We say that an act is free when it is not caused by a good that necessarily moves the will. But this absence of predetermination in the will may result from two sources, from the order of exercise and from the order of specification.

For example, there may be two or more different means of arriving at a given end, say two different roads leading to a town I want to visit. Since there is nothing in the nature of things that compels me to take one road to the exclusion of the other, I am free to choose between them. This freedom to choose one thing over another means that my act is free in the order of *specification*. But even if we suppose there is only one road, I am still free, since my visiting the town, which neces-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Text XIV, "Man Has Free Will," p. 286.



sarily requires taking the only road, is a particular good, and so does not present itself as absolutely necessary. Consequently my will remains free to decide to go or not to go. And this power to will or not to will is called freedom of exercise.

It scarcely needs mentioning, moreover, that both the freedom of exercise and specification rest on the contingent or particular character of the goods in question. From the standpoint of the agent, however, freedom of exercise is more basic, as even without the other it is enough to guarantee freedom. But when freedom of exercise is lacking, no free will is possible at all; whereas when specification is not free but self-imposed and necessary, as in the case of only one means being available, the will is still free, not to choose between means, but to act or not to act.

d) Election (choice) and the practical judgment.—As was noted earlier in examining the various steps of the free act, intellect and will work conjointly in producing it. This reciprocal movement or determination reaches a decisive stage at the last practical judgment. Suppose that having experienced a wish for something, I decide to pursue it (*intentio finis*). Several means being available, I deliberate about them. Sooner or later I must decide upon one. How is this final decision made? It is made by the will, but only after the intellect has judged that this particular means should be chosen. Through the last practical judgment (*judicium practicum*) of the intellect, I determine the means to be adopted, and through an act of the will I choose it (*electio*). In this process the judgment of the intellect and the choice of the will are applied concurrently. Which of the two, it may be asked, is the determining factor? The answer is that both are determining, but from different points of view. In the order of specification, I have chosen because I have judged; in the order of exercise, I have judged because I have chosen. These two steps, choice and practical judgment, are distinct; yet it is important to bear in mind that one determines the other, each in its own order. The free act, therefore, pro-

ceeds from intellect and will together. Since in the last analysis, however, the final decision is made by the will through the act of choice, we say that freedom has the will as its subject, but reason as its cause: *radix libertatis sicut subjectum est voluntas, sed sicut causa est ratio*.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Freedom and Determinism

Despite the common opinion of mankind, which clearly acknowledges the existence of free will, there have always been philosophers and schools of philosophy who, in one form or another, stoutly defend the opposite view, declaring the human act inexorably determined by fate and destiny. Not all philosophers, however, base their views on the same reasons.

According to some man is not free because, as just said, he is under the rule of destiny, or because he is like a cog in the cosmic wheel, whose own movement is necessary and determined. Others believe freedom is impossible because of theological reasons, since freedom, they say, would be incompatible with divine foreknowledge or predestination. This view is not unlike the philosophy of fate or destiny. Still others allege that freedom is contrary to the principle of causality, or to the conservation of energy, or more generally, it is a denial of the regularity of the laws of nature. At least from the standpoint of science, it is said, the only acceptable conclusion is an uncompromising determinism.

It is not our intention to enter upon a critical examination of these and similar opinions. This task must be left to the course in general philosophy or, preferably, to metaphysics, inasmuch as the questions raised are mainly metaphysical and must go to metaphysics for adequate answer. There is one form of determinism, however, that calls for some special attention here, since it is more immediately concerned with psychology. This is psychological determinism, the discussion of which may help to

<sup>24</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia IIae, q. 17, a. 1 ad 2.

define anew certain aspects of the doctrine of free will explained above.

a) *Psychological determinism*.—Perhaps the best statement of this form of determinism appears in Leibnitz, whom it is customary to consult for an explanation of it. Leibnitz propounds this doctrine in connection with his criticism of the so-called theory of freedom through indifference, which Descartes had apparently enunciated and espoused before him. According to the theory of indifference free will consists in the will being completely indifferent regarding the various motives upon which choice is based. The will, therefore, is supposedly in a state of perfect equilibrium respecting all motives, and when it makes a choice it does so by an impulse that is absolutely self-initiated, and in no way conditioned by anything outside the will. The free act, then, is one that arises from such an unconditioned impulse.

Leibnitz was quick to see, and had little difficulty in showing, that the so-called absolute indifference of the will in regard to all possible motives was a delusion. As a matter of fact, the will, as he pointed out, is attracted in different degrees by different motives, since some prove stronger than others. According to Leibnitz, however, the strongest motive must prevail, an eventuality that is only proper inasmuch as, in his view, even the divine will can but will what is best. Notwithstanding, the act of the will, he believes, remains spontaneous and is inspired by reason; consequently it still deserves to be called free.

Whatever its merits or demerits on details, in general we may observe that despite the good intentions of its author, the Leibnitzian theory of free will does not succeed in avoiding outright determinism. The strongest motive necessarily prevails, even as the universe itself is the best possible. All speculation about the possibility of other choices or other worlds remains just that: idle speculation.

In opposition to this and similar views it must be maintained



with St. Thomas that the will does not determine itself without motive, and, furthermore, that it is not necessarily determined by the so-called strongest motive. Indeed, the contention that the strongest motive must prevail is not founded in fact or experience, but is gratuitously asserted. What is a fact of experience is that prior to choice we find ourselves engaged in deliberating over and examining various motives, all of them holding out some attraction for us. Then we single out one of them and decide to follow it. The decision taken does indeed depend upon the motive; in fact, it is because I judged this particular motive to be best in this instance that I acted upon it. But the motive prevails only because the will settled upon and chose it. Hence, it actually becomes the strongest, but only because I made and wanted it so. Consequently, in my free act there is both determination by reason and spontaneous self-determination by the will. Without this appeal to both reason and will, the free act can be neither safeguarded nor accounted for.

b) *Why the will moves in this or that direction.*—Our study of the free act has shown that it does not admit of determination by the strongest motive in the Leibnitzian sense. This is not to deny, however, that in choosing the will may be more influenced by one motive or circumstance than by another. In *De Malo* St. Thomas goes into some detail regarding the reasons why the will responds to one motive rather than another.<sup>25</sup>

Considered as proceeding from the will, which means in the order of exercise, the free act is interiorly conditioned or moved by God alone, yet so as to act conformably to its nature, that is, freely and not by necessity.

Considered from the standpoint of specification, however, or as depending on the intellect and exclusive of the absolute good, whose moving power over the will is absolute and necessary, the free act may take one course rather than another for any one of the following three reasons. Either one motive has

<sup>25</sup> Cf. q. 6, art. unica.

become dominant, being so appraised by the intellect and accepted by the will, as when a man chooses what is suitable to health because it suits the will. Or, only one motive or circumstance may have been considered—a frequent occurrence. And lastly, the disposition or character of the subject may be the reason why one object interests him more than another. One who is stirred by the onrush of passion or labors under the burden of habit will naturally be inclined to so judge of the impending situation as to suit his passion or habit. It is for this reason that the same object does not make the same impression on the angry man and one who is calm, on the virtuous and the corrupt, on the sick and the well. The ways in which emotions, habits, and similar conditions influence the choice of the will are varied and infinitely complex. Ordinarily, however, such influence does not overcome the will. If we except the cases, mentioned earlier, where specification necessitates one's choice, and those unusual instances where the storm of passion temporarily deprives an individual of the use of reason, which is his faculty of judgment, the will when confronted with particular goods always retains its essential power to determine itself or not to determine itself, to act or not to act.

#### CONCLUSION: COMPARATIVE STANDING OF THE THOMISTIC DOCTRINE OF FREE WILL

In signal agreement with that of Aristotle, the Thomistic doctrine of free will stands between two extremes, between the extreme of the indeterminism that regards the self-initiated act of the will as the product of a nonmotivated spontaneity, and the extreme of the determinism that believes the will must bend to the strongest motive. In general, though by no means in every detail, the first represents the view, say of Descartes or Bergson, and the second typifies the rationalism of the Leibnizian era.

For St. Thomas, on the other hand, free will results neither

from nonmotivated spontaneity nor from an overpowering motive; yet it includes both spontaneity and motivation, each in its own way determining the other. As more than once mentioned, this reciprocal determination is variously expressed as specification on the one side and exercise on the other, as practical judgment and election, or more profoundly, since they are the bases for the other relations involved, as intellect and will.

Once more, then, freedom is both from will and intellect; from the will as from its subject, and from the faculty of reason as from its cause: *radix libertatis est voluntas sicut subjectum, sed sicut causa est ratio.*<sup>26</sup> We see, therefore, why St. Thomas can define free will indifferently as intellect endowed with appetite, *intellectus appetitivus*, or—and this is perhaps better—as appetite endowed with intellect, *appetitus intellectivus*. In the alliance of these two terms, appetitive intellect and intellectual appetite, is to be found whatever meaning and mystery free will provides.

<sup>26</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia IIae, q. 17, a. 1 ad 2.



## † CHAPTER 10

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# The Human Soul

### I. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

† a) *Resuming the study of the soul proper.*—We have already discussed the soul in general in our chapter on the nature and the degrees of vital activity.<sup>1</sup> Among other things, we saw that the soul as such, which means any soul, may be defined in preliminary fashion as the first principle of life, since this is the notion of it that comes naturally, as it were, to the inquiring mind and is commonly accepted by all philosophy. Next, considering the soul in terms of the hylomorphic theory of substance, we found that it is the substantial form of the body, a doctrine that is not common to all philosophy but peculiar to the Aristotelian school. From this interpretation of the soul, moreover, we deduced a number of its properties. Being the formal principle of a living being that is one, the soul itself of each such being must be one, and only one, in every instance; hence it is also indivisible and, in essence, present in its entirety in every part of the body. Furthermore, conformable to the gen-

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2, "Life, the Soul, and Its Activities."

eral laws of physical substances, the soul must also disappear (in formal language: corrupt) when the composite substance of which it is the form disintegrates or corrupts.

Apart from corruptibility, the aforesaid properties belong to all souls, including that of man. As previously noted, however, the human soul, being the principle of a higher degree of life, which is intellectual life, also enjoys special prerogatives, so that it gives evidence of differing from lower souls not merely in degree but in kind and in its very being. It is this special nature and these special prerogatives of the human soul that we must now explain more thoroughly.

b) *The human soul in the philosophy of Aristotle.*—One of the essential contributions of Platonism was its enduring ratification of a world of intelligible reality completely separate from matter, a world to which the human soul itself belonged. In reaction to what seemed to him an ultra-intellectualism in Plato, Aristotle, as we know, propounded his original definition of the soul as the substantial form of the body. In doing so, however, Aristotle had not, and did not pretend to have, solved the entire problem of a mind, a *nous*, that could be substantially united to the body and yet be purely spiritual. He was only putting it off; and as a matter of fact we find him again raising it when he takes up the question of the intellectual activity of the soul.<sup>2</sup>

In this further consideration of the human soul Aristotle plainly acknowledges that it possesses properties revealing it to be altogether different from material realities. It was clear to him, as Anaxagoras had suggested, that the reality of the human mind must be free of all admixture, that is, devoid of all corporeal natures, seeing that it is in potency with respect to all forms or determinations of such natures, and so could not be actually constituted by any of them.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he asserted that

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *De Anima*, III, 4, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 429 a 18–28.

mind considered as active or agent power is separate from matter, and it is eternal and immortal.<sup>4</sup>

In an earlier context we mentioned that the obscurity of these crucial passages on the intellect were to give rise to various interpretations, the most common one before St. Thomas having been that Aristotle affirmed the existence of an intellectual principle that was indeed spiritual, but absolutely separate from matter, and one and the same for all men. Thus, individual and personal immortality of the human soul went by the board.

c) *The interpretation of St. Thomas.*—Like all Christian philosophers St. Thomas knew from revelation that the human soul is spiritual and personally immortal. On this there could be no compromise. We are not surprised, then, to see him give these texts of Aristotle an interpretation that salvaged not only the spirituality but also the personal immortality of the soul. In his view the soul is still the form of the body; but beyond that it has spiritual and subsistent being in every individual, and it is individually incorruptible. These points will be considered in the next portion of the present chapter, in which we treat of the nature of the human soul.

The Christian tradition, however, and particularly the Augustinian depositions, have greatly enhanced our knowledge of the human soul. In fact, the Christian teaching unveils the spirit world in all its breadth and depth, comprising not only the human spirit but also the angelic and the divine. We shall have to inquire, therefore, whether the human soul may not bear the mark of its kinship with the world above, and whether it may not be so constituted as to admit of participation even in the upmost life of that world. Though largely theological, philosophy can offer some preliminary answers to these questions; and this we shall do in the concluding part of the chapter.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 430 a 17, 24.



## II. THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN SOUL

Three brief statements, one implying another, sum up the essential teaching as to the nature of the human soul. They are: 1) the human soul is spiritual; 2) it is subsistent (that is, it can exist by itself, apart from the body); and 3) it is incorruptible.

a) *The human soul is spiritual.*—The nature of the human soul, it will be recalled, can be known to us from its operations only, since these alone, and not the soul itself, are directly perceptible. Our present interest lies in the operation that is specifically characteristic of man, intellectual understanding. The spiritual nature of this activity is seen both from its object and from its manner of apprehending the object.

*The object of intellectual knowledge.* The intellect can know all corporeal natures. This fact precludes the intellect being entitatively constituted of any of these natures. Hence, it is not corporeal but spiritual. St. Thomas develops this argument as follows:

It is clear that by means of the intellect man can have knowledge of all corporeal things. Now whatever knows certain things cannot have any of them in its own nature; because that which is in it naturally would impede the knowledge of anything else. Thus we observe that a sick man's tongue being vitiated by a feverish and bitter humor, is insensible to anything sweet, and everything seems bitter to it. Therefore, if the intellectual principle contained the nature of a body it would be unable to know all bodies. Now every body has its own determinate nature. Therefore it is impossible for the intellectual principle to be a body.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, not only is the intellect incorporeal, but its activity cannot be exercised through a bodily organ, because such an organ, having a determinate nature, would again prevent the intellect from knowing all bodies. "The determinate nature of that organ," observes St. Thomas, "would impede knowledge

<sup>5</sup> *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 75, a. 2.

of all bodies; as when a certain determinate color is not only in the pupil of the eye, but also in a glass vase, the liquid in the vase seems to be of that same color. Therefore the intellectual principle which we call the mind (*mens*) or the intellect has a proper (*per se*) operation apart from the body.”<sup>6</sup>

*The manner of apprehending the object.* The intellect apprehends its object in universal and abstractive fashion, which means independently of all material conditions. Thanks, moreover, to its abstractive process, the intellect can conceive purely spiritual realities. But it could do neither the one nor the other if in its operation it depended on matter or a material organ. For these reasons intellectual activity is purely spiritual.

At this point of the argument we can apply the axiom *agere sequitur esse*: like operation like being, and conversely. From the spirituality of the operation, therefore, we may immediately infer the spirituality of its principle. Accordingly, the spirituality that is a necessary condition of intellectual knowledge, is required not only for the act but also for the potency producing the act and, ultimately, for the being in which the potency is rooted.

b) *The subsistence (or substantiality) of the spiritual soul.*—That the human soul is subsistent of itself, a “hoc aliquid,” as St. Thomas terms it, is also immediately deducible from the arguments for its spirituality. Briefly, the radical principle of any operation must be a subsistent being, one that does not inhere in another. But the spiritual soul, the *mens*, is the ultimate or radical principle in man of his intellectual, meaning spiritual, activities; consequently it is a spiritual subsistent being, which is to say a spiritual substance.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The argument for the substantiality of the soul is sometimes put in the following, perhaps less formal, terms: Accidents must inhere in a substance, and spiritual accidents in a spiritual substance. Intellectual operations, however, are spiritual accidents; hence the soul, which is their ultimate subject of inherence, is a spiritual substance.—Translator’s note.

The subsistence or substantiality of the soul, however, raises the question whether Plato was not right in teaching that the soul is, so to speak, sufficient to itself for its operations as well as its being, and that its presence in the body is only accidental and to no advantage? If, in other words, the soul has its own act of existence, what ground is there for saying that it is also the form of the body, or that the human individual is still essentially one being and not two? The answer to this problem, as St. Thomas explains, is that subsistence may be of two kinds. It may be such as to include the complete species or essence, as in this stone, this plant, and this man. Or it may not include the complete essence, as in the human soul without the body. Taken as substance, therefore, the human soul is complete, since it can exist by itself. Taken as species or essence in relation to man it is not complete, since the soul alone is not the complete essence of man, but the soul and body together. This is what St. Thomas means when he writes: "It follows that the soul is a particular thing (*hoc aliquid*) and that it can subsist of itself, not as a thing having a complete species of its own, but as completing the human species by being the form of the body. Hence it likewise follows that it is both a form and a particular thing."<sup>8</sup>

c) *The incorruptibility of the human soul.*—The incorruptibility, and therefore the immortality of the human soul follow from its spirituality and substantiality. A thing may corrupt *per accidens* or accidentally (which is not to be confused with "happening by chance"), or it may corrupt *per se*, meaning of itself. If a thing cannot exist without something else to which it is joined, it ceases to be when the conjoined reality ceases: it is corrupted *per accidens*. All forms, whether substantial or accidental, whose existence is contingent on a material subject are

<sup>8</sup> "Relinquitur igitur quod anima est hoc aliquid ut per se potens subsistere, non quasi habens in se completam speciem, sed quasi perficiens speciem humanam ut forma corporis, et sic similiter est forma et hoc aliquid" (*Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 1).



liable to corruption *per accidens*. Thus, the death of an animal is also the end of its substantial form or soul. The human soul, on the other hand, subsists of itself, as was proved above. Since it does not depend on the body for its existence, it is not corruptible *per accidens*.

If, then, the soul were corruptible, its corruption would be substantial or *per se*; it would come from and affect the substance of the soul itself. But this, too, is impossible, because corruption *per se* means that a thing ceases to be through decomposition. The soul, however, has no composition of matter and form or of any other constituent parts. The soul is pure form, utterly simple, having, as we have shown, its own act of existence. "If there is a form," writes St. Thomas, "having an act of existing in itself, then that form must be incorruptible. For a thing having an act of existing does not cease to exist unless its form is separated from it. Hence if the thing having an act of existing is itself a form, it is impossible for its act of existing to be separated from it." <sup>9</sup> In fine, the soul is all form and so cannot be separated from anything, since it cannot be separated from itself. Of its very nature, then, it is incorruptible, which is to say immortal.

Yet, the natural immortality of the soul does not entail its absolute indestructibility from any source whatsoever. For, the soul is not a necessary being by the same token as God. It is a created being and continues after its creation to depend for

<sup>9</sup> *Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 14.

To one untrained in Thomistic metaphysics the reasoning in the text, which bases the incorruptibility of the soul on its being a form with its own act of existence, may not be immediately evident. What it says in effect is this: All substances, including the soul, exist in themselves and not in another. However, some substances, being composed of matter and form, are subject to dissolution. But the human soul is pure form, and not a composite of matter and form or any other entitative parts; it is utterly simple and indivisible. Hence it does not carry a principle of disintegration or dissolution. It is therefore naturally incorruptible, or everlasting.—Translator's note.

its existence upon the cause that produced it. This cause, but none other, could also annihilate it. Incorruptible, therefore, and immortal though it be, and both in being and function beyond the annihilatory reach of every creature, the soul yet bears the implanted and ineradicable mark of total submission to the power and principality of its Creator.

Besides the aforesaid argument for incorruptibility, which is fundamental, St. Thomas sees another indication of immortality in man's desire for it. Since this is a natural desire, it cannot be in vain. Writes St. Thomas:

Everything naturally aspires to existence after its own manner. Now, in things that have knowledge, desire ensues upon knowledge. The senses indeed do not know existence, except under the conditions of here and now (*hic et nunc*), whereas the intellect apprehends existence absolutely, and for all time; so that everything that has an intellect naturally desires always to exist. But a natural desire cannot be in vain. Therefore, every intellectual substance is incorruptible.<sup>10</sup>

### III. ON THE INTELLECTIVE STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN SOUL

By his soul man belongs to the world of spirits. It may well be, then, that the ultimate structure of the soul has much in common with the nature of spirits above it, and perhaps not a little with the supreme Spirit. St. Thomas certainly thought so, as we had some occasion to observe in speaking of the knowledge of

<sup>10</sup> "Potest etiam hujus rei accipi signum ex hoc quod unumquodque naturaliter suo modo esse desiderat. Desiderium autem in rebus cognoscen-  
tibus sequitur cognitionem. Sensus autem non cognoscit esse nisi sub hic  
et nunc, sed intellectus apprehendit esse absolute, et secundum omne  
tempus. Unde omne habens intellectum naturaliter desiderat esse semper.  
Naturale autem desiderium non potest esse inane. Omnis igitur intellectu-  
alis substantia est incorruptibilis" (*Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 75, a. 6).

Cf. Text XV, "The Human Soul Is Immortal," p. 289.

the soul through itself. It is once more to the basic structure of the human soul that we now turn our attention.<sup>11</sup>

a) *The intellective structure of "mens."*—To designate the spiritual soul of man St. Thomas uses the term *mens*. Occasionally he applies it to pure spirits (angels), who are called *totaliter mens*, but generally its meaning is confined to the incarnate spirit that is our soul. As to the more particular point whether this term refers merely to the intellective potency, or to the essence of the soul as well, the answer is that like the term *intellectus*, the word *mens* covers both, denoting sometimes the faculty of intellect and sometimes the intellective soul itself. In general, therefore, we may say that when St. Thomas speaks of "mens," he means the spiritual soul as the principle of our higher, or spiritual, operations.

What, then, is the inner nature or structure of "mens"? The key to this inmost realm of the soul may be found in a consideration of the nature of those higher created spirits called angels. If raised to the proper degree of immateriality, any being, it should be noted, not only possesses its own form but is capable of receiving the form of other things: it is then a subject that can know. If, moreover, this being is wholly devoid of matter, it is immediately intelligible in itself. Such is the pure spirit or angel. What characterizes the angel is that he is both, and at the same time, intellect and intelligible object in act; and, besides, the intelligible object which answers to his essence is immediately present to his faculty of knowledge or intellect. All the conditions for the act of knowing himself are thus realized: his intelligible object is his essence, it is intelligible in act, and it is immediately present to his intellect. The angel, therefore, knows himself through his essence, *per essentiam*, and this es-

<sup>11</sup> Those to whom it is accessible will find more detailed consideration of the nature of the soul in A. Gardeil, O.P., *La structure de l'âme et l'expérience mystique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1927), I, 47-152.



sence, to repeat, is also the proper object of his faculty of knowledge.

Coming now to the human soul, we find both its present and its future condition comparable to the angel's, though not to the same degree in both instances. In the state of separation the human soul thinks and knows, though still imperfectly so, in the manner of an angel. Already in this life, therefore, it must possess the power to know itself directly, at least in latent form, that is, in the manner of a habit. This, as a matter of fact, is what St. Thomas means in saying that the soul knows itself through itself by habitual knowledge. Accordingly, in so far as the human soul is a spirit, a "*mens*," its distinguishing mark is to be an intelligent subject whose intelligible object (itself) is immediately present to it. In the present life of union with the body, however, the actualization of the radical capacity to know itself directly which lies at the heart of the soul, is impeded; it is impeded by the soul's having to turn for its present, abstract knowledge to sensible things. In the following quotation John of St. Thomas gives an excellent statement of the matter at hand:

As for the contention that in the present state our soul is not objectively [i.e., as an object of knowledge] present to and united with the intellect, though it is united with it subjectively (as the source and principle of intellect), I will say that this objective union is already realized essentially (*in specie*) and virtually (*in virtute*), even as the state of separation is already present virtually. However, this objective union is not now actually manifested, though even now it actually exists in the intellect; and the reason why it is not actually manifested lies in the soul's having to turn to sensible things in order to know, a circumstance that prevents it from knowing itself immaterially purely through itself. Therefore the intellect in emanating from the soul, emanates from it both as from an intelligent source and as from an intelligible object, but from an object not in this life actually manifesting its intelligibility in a purely spiritual manner and immediately through itself. For, the soul's

immediate intelligibility is impeded by the soul's having to turn to sensible things. Consequently, this intimate and innermost union of soul with intellect, whether in the order of being or of knowledge (*tam in ratione intellectualis, quam intelligibilis*), is not evident before the state of separation.<sup>12</sup>

In fine, what this means is that while the natural condition of the soul is to be informing the body and exercising its activities in union with the body, in principle and in latent manner it already owns whatever it needs to live as a pure spirit. We find here yet another illustration of the dual nature of man, a nature that is both embodied and spiritual. In varying degrees this twofold aspect of being both body-dependent and body-transcendent emerges at every level of his conscious life, indeed of all life, and it could not but exist at the very core of his being.

b) *The soul as image of God*.—Ennobled as the soul of man is by its close kinship with pure spirits, it is still more splendid and glorious by another kinship which the Christian teacher may not overlook. For the soul is not only like the angels: it is like God. Did not the Creator say: "Let us make man to our image and likeness"? <sup>13</sup> The entire philosophy of the soul of St. Augustine, and in consequence of the Middle Ages, was inspired

<sup>12</sup> "Ad id quod dicitur de anima nostra, quod pro praesenti statu non est praesens, et unita intellectui objective, licet sit unita subjective, et ut sustentans illum, respondetur quod pro hoc statu illa unio objectiva, et in ratione speciei ibi est in virtute, sicut status separationis ibi est in virtute, sed non in actu manifestatur, etiamsi actu jam existat in intellectu, propter conversionem ejus ad sensibilia, ex qua impeditur intelligere seipsam immaterialiter pure per seipsam. Itaque intellectus, ut emanat ab anima, emanat ut a radice intelligente, et ut ab objecto intelligibili, sed non actu manifestante intelligibilitatem suam pure spiritualiter, et per se immediate pro isto statu, sed impedita manet intelligibilitas ob conversionem ad sensibilia; et ideo illa conjunctio ad intellectum intima tam in ratione intellectualis, quam intelligibilis non operatur manifestationem usque ad statum separationis" (*Cursus theologicus*, In Iam Part., q. 55, disp. 21, a. 2, n. xiii).

<sup>13</sup> Gen. 1:26.

and illuminated by these words of Holy Writ. St. Bonaventure above all, who was much occupied in reading the imprint and vestige of God in all creation, took special delight in tracing His image in the soul. Doubtless, this approach to the soul takes us beyond pure philosophy. We are here in the realm of faith and revelation; but, then, it must be remembered that our Christian masters of times gone by, though well aware of the difference between faith and reason, made no pretense of eliminating one or the other from their search of truth. If, then, we want a true appreciation of what they taught on the soul, as well as on other matters, we cannot limit the discussion to the domain of reason, but must penetrate the confines of revelation.<sup>14</sup>

In speaking of the soul as image of God, Christian writers and teachers attached a very particular meaning to the word. An image, for them, was not simply a likeness. Two things may be like each other without the one, properly speaking, being an image of the other. To be an image a thing has also to be the expression of another, so that an image proceeds from its model or exemplar. This "procession," moreover, must result, not merely in a distant resemblance, but in a specific likeness, expressing an authentic kinship of nature. Not all creatures, therefore, can be called images of God, though all bear His imprint, since they proceed from Him. Strictly speaking, only intellectual creatures merit this title. All things below them are but "vestiges" of God.

Examining the matter more closely, we discover that the intelligent creature is an image of God from two points of view, the one more profound than the other. For, we may consider the human soul as a created expression both of God's one nature and of the trinity of His Persons. So far as the spiritual soul has intellectual life it is already an image of God's nature. But we also observe in the soul a certain "procession" of the mental word from the intellect, and a certain "procession" of love from the will. One may therefore see in it the image of the

<sup>14</sup> On man as the image of God see *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 93.



trinity of the divine Persons, who are distinguished by the relations existing among Them, the second Person being in the relation of the Word to the Father, whose expression the Word is, and the Holy Spirit, who is Love, proceeding both from the Father and the Word.

For his discussion of the soul as image of the Trinity, St. Thomas was indebted to the various analyses, both ingenious and penetrating, of the soul and its properties which he found in St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*. To facilitate the direct consideration of the mystery of the Trinity, as well as of other mysteries of God, St. Augustine tried to find analogies in the life of our own spiritual soul. If, for example, we consider the human soul from the standpoint of its potencies or habits, we meet with one analogy in the triad: *mens* (mind), *notitia* (knowledge), and *amor* (love); and a second in the triad: *memoria* (memory), *intelligentia* (understanding), and *voluntas* (will). In the first, "mens" designates the potency, and "notitia" and "amor" the habits that dispose the potency to its act. In the second analogy, which is more perfect, "memoria" signifies the habitual knowledge of the soul, "intelligentia" the actual cognition proceeding from habitual knowledge, and "voluntas" the actual movement of the will proceeding from thought.<sup>15</sup>

To be sure, the true meaning of such analogies and images, which are drawn from the deepest recesses of the soul, can be seen only by the light of faith, or in terms of a psychology that is based, at least in part, on supernatural doctrine. Here, then, we have touched on a matter which, as intimated earlier, exceeds the scope of the present work. Still, in setting forth the nature of the soul according to St. Thomas it would have hardly been proper to omit all mention of that aspect which the Angelic Doctor considers its highest endowment, namely, its being the image of God even as to His hiddenmost being, and, in consequence, capable of sharing His inmost life.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Text XVI, "The Image of God," p. 292.

## CONCLUSION TO THE WHOLE

a) To conclude this whole presentation of the soul according to St. Thomas, may we first of all advert once more to the *method* followed by him. A mere glance is enough to show that the difference between his procedure and that of most modern psychologists is considerable, if not fundamental. The moderns, for the most part, do not go beyond the level of immediate observation and approximate or provisional explanation, whereas the psychology of St. Thomas rests at all points on metaphysical ground and is never completely removed from the metaphysical terrain. It seeks above all to discover the deeper aspects of human nature, and always with a view to establishing the foundations of that higher life of the soul which rightly commands the attention of the theologian rather than the pure philosopher.

And yet, it must not be forgotten that in the Aristotelian tradition, to which St. Thomas adheres, the study of the soul comes as a logical continuation of the inquiry into the nature of physical or corporeal being. Consequently, even though in this philosophy of man the spiritual side of his nature eventually stands out in bold relief, the fact remains that his corporeal or biological side is the starting point for the study of the soul and never loses its meaning or relevancy throughout the inquiry. For reasons of brevity, however, we have had to sharply curtail the inspection of the considerable part that empirical observation and analysis play in the investigations of Aristotle especially, and scarcely less in those of his followers. Consequently, unless these limitations to our study are kept in mind, the reader could quite possibly come away with a faulty impression. For, we have far from taken complete survey of many areas of psychological exploration that seriously occupied the minds of earlier masters and disciples in the tradition, such as the study of the senses and their activities, or the probing of such more elusive phenomena as dreams and sleep and memory. Add to

this that these men also displayed remarkable insight in studying the moral aspects of psychological activities, notably in the analysis of the passions and emotions. Here, too, however, we have had to be satisfied with occasional and passing mention. Accordingly, set forth in all its wealth and detail, the psychology of Aristotle or St. Thomas might well present a decidedly different appearance. The essential form and features, however, would still be the same.

b) As for the *position* or basic conception of the psychology of St. Thomas in relation to what came before and after, the substance of what needs to be said, has been said. We have seen that compared with its antecedents, St. Thomas' psychology, like that of Aristotle, takes the form of a "via media." Plato had indeed, and none before him, succeeded in extricating the activity of thought (*nous*) from the activity of sense; but he had also left behind him the complete divorce of ideas from matter, of mind from body. Aristotle kept the distinction but did not rest until he was satisfied that soul and body had been restored to substantial unity; and St. Thomas made sure that as far as he was concerned this unity should not again be destroyed. St. Thomas, however, had also to square himself with the demands put on him by the Christian teaching. With him, therefore, the higher reaches and manifestations of the soul grow in importance: the soul, without ceasing to be the form of the body, finds a rightful place in the order of pure intelligences.

This bifocal approach of St. Thomas to his study of the soul accounts for the fullness and the richness, but also for the complexity and sometimes seeming uncertainty of the psychological doctrine he has bequeathed. Perhaps what we learn better from St. Thomas than from anyone else is that the human soul lies at the crossroads of two worlds, so that his psychology looks in two directions at once. From one side it appears extremely embodied, extremely biological, resembling in no small measure the approach of modern investigation with its heavy accent on



man's organism. From the other side it seems just the opposite, extremely disembodied, and extremely spiritual.

So it is that the bilateral nature of man reveals itself at almost every turn. We see it now in the bodily dependence yet radical independence of the soul, now in the immanence yet transcendence of its being and operations. Our faculties, we note, are receptive potencies, the soul having to gather its raw materials from the outside before it can begin its activity. Perforce, consciousness or mental life is kindled from without. On the other hand, vital activity—the operations of the soul are manifestly such—is also immanent; in fact, its distinguishing mark is not only to proceed from within, but also to terminate in the being in which it originates.

Already discernible in vegetative life, the quality of immanent or self-initiated activity becomes more pronounced as one mounts the scale of life, its highest instance in man being the knowledge of the soul through itself. Not a few modern thinkers make much of the immanent character of the activity of the mind. It is interesting to note that St. Thomas was far from overlooking or minimizing this aspect of thought, which in man, however, is still imperfect. In the higher spirits life is essentially immanent, yet only in God does it reach its absolute perfection, since His life is utterly and eminently immanent. Compared with that of the angels, and even more of God, the quality of immanence in man is not realized in all respects, because his activity always depends on something other than himself: on the world of matter in this life, and still in the next on the primordial action of God. Doubtless, there exists in man a spirit in the true sense of the word, but the natural condition of this spirit is to be in the body. And if, as is true, man's higher self is the image of God, it is but a distant one. In the body or out, the spirit of man, let alone his body, is at every moment and in every manner totally dependent on God.

†

## Texts

† THE writings of St. Thomas so abound in fine installments relating to the study of psychology that one is almost at a loss when attempting to draw up a list of illustrative readings. Besides the Commentary on *De Anima*, which remains the prime source, we have in the *Summa theologiae* (Ia. qq. 75 to 89) a virtually complete exposition on the soul and its faculties and operations. Indeed, these questions from the *Summa* may be taken without hesitation as the best over-all account of the subject matter treated in the foregoing study; and the student who wants to have more than a nodding acquaintance with the psychology of St. Thomas could not do better than go through them carefully, article by article, some hundred in all. Since these questions, however, are readily available in translation,<sup>1</sup> we

<sup>1</sup> The questions referred to can be had in English translation in *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, edited by A. C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), and in the complete American edition of the English Dominican translation of the *Summa theologiae* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947).—Translator's note.

have chosen only two articles among them, both from the question having to do with the knowledge of material things (q. 85, aa. 1-2). From the various commentaries on Aristotle, in which St. Thomas generally proceeds at greater length and in greater detail than elsewhere, we have made no selections at all. By this omission we do not imply that the commentaries are unimportant—they are supremely important; rather, this course is dictated by the practical limitations of choice in such a wealth of material.

Most of our texts, then, are from the *Quaestiones Disputatae*; for, these writings not only are replete with psychological discussions, but they are usually unexcelled when it comes to handling a problem in whole. Furthermore, what we have said as to the integral character of the psychological section of the *Summa* applies as well to the body of psychological doctrine to be found in the *Quaestiones Disputatae*, especially in the *Quaestio de Anima*. Like the former, the latter, too, is so extensive and so coherently arranged as to present yet another entire treatise on the soul.<sup>2</sup>

## I. THE DEGREES OF IMMANENCE IN VITAL ACTIVITY

(*Contra Gentiles*, IV, 11)

The whole psychology of St. Thomas is built around a hierarchical conception of life. Accordingly, of all the passages that might serve as an introduction to the subject, none could be more appropriate than the following excerpt

<sup>2</sup> The texts are reprinted in English from individual sources. These have been mentioned in the Acknowledgments at the beginning of the volume, and are again separately identified and acknowledged after each selection.—Tr.



from the *Contra Gentiles*, in which the various degrees of immanence associated with vital activity are set forth in turn. Since, moreover, "vital" activity as here understood corresponds to "immanent" reality in the sense of the moderns, it should be apparent that the directive principle of St. Thomas' thought in the matter at hand bears significant resemblance to the thesis that was so largely to pervade the thinking of many modern philosophers, particularly in epistemology and metaphysics. (Collate with *supra*, "Life and the Degrees of Life," p. 17.)

Where things differ in nature we find different modes of emanation, and further, from the higher nature things proceed in a more intimate way. Now, of all things the inanimate obtain the lowest place, and from them no emanation is possible except by the action of one on another: thus, fire is engendered from fire when an extraneous body is transformed by fire, and receives the quality and form of fire. ?

The next place to inanimate bodies belongs to plants, whence emanation proceeds from within, for as much as the plant's intrinsic humor is converted into seed, which being committed to the soil grows into a plant. Accordingly, here we find the first traces of life: since living things are those which move themselves to act, whereas those which can only move extraneous things are wholly lifeless. It is a sign of life in plants that something within them is the cause of a form. Yet the plant's life is imperfect because, although in it emanation proceeds from within, that which emanates comes forth by little and little, and in the end becomes altogether extraneous: thus the humor of a tree gradually comes forth from the tree and eventually becomes a blossom, and then takes the form of fruit distinct from the branch, though united thereto; and when the fruit is perfect it is altogether severed from the tree, and falling to the ground,

produces by its seminal force another plant. Indeed, if we consider the matter carefully we shall see that the first principle of this emanation is something extraneous, since the intrinsic humor of the tree is drawn through the roots from the soil whence the plant derives its nourishment.

There is yet above that of the plants a higher form of life, which is that of the sensitive soul, the proper emanation whereof, though beginning from without, terminates within. Also, the further the emanation proceeds, the more does it penetrate within; for the sensible object impresses a form on the external senses, whence it proceeds to the imagination and, further still, to the storehouse of the memory. Yet in every process of this kind of emanation, the beginning and the end are in different subjects; for no sensitive power reflects on itself. Wherefore this degree of life transcends that of plants in so much as it is more intimate; and yet it is not a perfect life, since the emanation is always from one thing to another.

Wherefore the highest degree of life is that which is according to the intellect; for the intellect reflects on itself, and can understand itself. There are, however, various degrees in the intellectual life: because the human mind, though able to know itself, takes its first steps to knowledge from without; for it cannot understand apart from phantasms, as we have already made clear (II, 50). Accordingly, intellectual life is more perfect in the angels whose intellect does not proceed from something extrinsic to acquire self-knowledge, but knows itself by itself. Yet their life does not reach the highest degree of perfection because, though the intelligible species is altogether within them, it is not their very substance, because in them to understand and to be are not the same thing, as we have already shown (II, 52). Therefore, the highest perfection of life belongs to God, whose understanding is not distinct from His being, as we have proved (I, 45). Wherefore the intelligible species in God must be the divine essence itself. (From *Contra Gentiles*,

trans. by the English Dominican Fathers. Reprinted by permission of Burns Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., publishers.)

## II. THE HUMAN SOUL IS BOTH A FORM AND A SUBSTANTIAL INDIVIDUAL

(*Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 1)

The keystone to Aristotle's psychology is that the soul is the substantial form of the body. To illustrate this central doctrine we have selected an extensive passage from the *Quaestio Disputata de Anima*, in which the point is fully discussed. It will be seen that the teaching of Aristotle is opposed both to the materialist doctrines of Empedocles and Galen and to the Platonic notion that the soul is to the body as the pilot to his ship. St. Thomas follows Aristotle in affirming that the soul is the form of the body, and states further, what is not so clear in Aristotle, that its existence is one of an independent substance. The precise question here raised, then, is twofold: Whether the soul is both a form and a determinate or particular individual, a "hoc aliquid." St. Thomas opens the body of the article with a brief explanation of this phrase, observing that "hoc aliquid" means a substantial individual, and that this in turn implies two things, to subsist by itself and to possess a complete specific nature. Then follows the excerpt below. (Collate with *supra*, "The Aristotelian Definition of the Soul," p. 24.)

a) Now some men have denied that the human soul possesses these two real characteristics belonging to a particular thing by its very nature, because they said that the soul is a harmony, as Empedocles did, or a combination [of the elements], as Galen did, or something of this kind. For then the



soul will neither be able to subsist of itself, nor will it be a complete thing belonging to a species or genus of substance, but will be a form similar only to other material forms.

But this position is untenable as regards the vegetal soul, whose operations necessarily require some principle surpassing the active and passive qualities [of the elements] which play only an instrumental role in nutrition and growth, as is proved in *De Anima* (II, 4, 415 b 28 ff.). Moreover, a combination and a harmony do not transcend the elemental qualities. This position is likewise untenable as regards the sentient soul, whose operations consist in receiving species separated from matter, as is shown in *De Anima* (II, 12, 424 a 16). For inasmuch as active and passive qualities are dispositions of matter, they do not transcend matter. Again, this position is even less tenable as regards the rational soul, whose operation consists in understanding, and in abstracting species not only from matter, but from all individuating conditions, this being required for the understanding of universals. However, in the case of the rational soul something of special importance must still be considered, because not only does it receive intelligible species without matter and material conditions, but it is also quite impossible for it, in performing its proper operation, to have anything in common with a bodily organ, as though something corporeal might be an organ of understanding, just as the eye is the organ of sight, as is proved in *De Anima* (III, 4, 429 a 10-26). Thus the intellective soul, inasmuch as it performs its proper operation without communicating in any way with the body, must act of itself. And because a thing acts so far as it is actual, the intellective soul must have a complete act of existing in itself, depending in no way on the body. For forms whose act of existing depends on matter or on a subject do not operate of themselves. Heat, for instance, does not act, but something hot.

b) For this reason the later Greek philosophers came to the

conclusion that the intellective part of the soul is a self-subsisting thing. For the Philosopher says, in *De Anima* (III, 5, 430 a 24), that the intellect is a substance, and is not corrupted. The teaching of Plato, who maintains that the soul is incorruptible and subsists of itself in view of that fact that it moves itself, amounts to the same thing. For he took 'motion' in a broad sense to signify every operation; hence he understands that the soul moves itself because it acts by itself.

But elsewhere Plato maintained that the human soul not only subsisted of itself, but also had the complete nature of a species. For he held that the complete nature of the [human] species is found in the soul, saying that a man is not a composite of soul and body, but a soul joined to a body in such a way that it is related to the body as a pilot is to a ship, or as one clothed to his clothing.

However, this position is untenable, because it is obvious that the soul is the reality which gives life to the body. Moreover, to have life is the act of existing of living things. Consequently the soul is that which gives the human body its act of existing. Now a form is of this nature. Therefore the human soul is the form of the body. But if the soul were in the body as a pilot in a ship, it would give neither the body nor its parts their specific nature. The contrary of this is seen to be true, because, when the soul leaves the body, the body's individual parts retain their original names only in an equivocal sense. For the eye of a dead man, like the eye of a portrait or that of a statue, is called an eye equivocally; and similarly for the other parts of the body. Furthermore, if the soul were in the body as a pilot in a ship, it would follow that the union of soul and body would be an accidental one. Then death, which brings about their separation, would not be a substantial corruption; which is clearly false.

c) So it follows that the soul is a particular thing and that it can subsist of itself, not as a thing having a complete species of

its own, but as completing the human species by being the form of the body. Hence it likewise follows that it is both a form and a particular thing.

Indeed, this can be shown from the order of natural forms. For we find among the forms of lower bodies that the higher a form is, the more it resembles and approaches higher principles. This can be seen from the proper operation of forms. For the forms of the elements, being lowest, and nearest to matter, possess no operation surpassing their active and passive qualities, such as rarefaction and condensation, and the like, which appear to be material dispositions. Over and above these forms are those of the mixed bodies, and these forms have, in addition to the above-mentioned operations, a certain activity consequent upon their species, which they receive from the celestial bodies. The magnet, for instance, attracts iron not because of its heat or its cold or anything of this sort, but because it shares in the powers of the heavens. Again, surpassing these forms are the souls of plants, which resemble not only the forms of earthly bodies but also the movers of the celestial bodies inasmuch as they are principles of a certain motion through themselves being moved. Still higher are brute beasts' forms, which resemble a substance moving a celestial body not only because of the operation whereby they move their bodies, but also because they are capable of knowledge, although their knowledge is concerned merely with material things and belongs to the material order, for which reason they require bodily organs. Again, over and above these forms, and in the highest place, are human souls, which resemble superior substances even with respect to the kind of knowledge they possess, because they are capable of knowing immaterial things by their act of intellection. However, human souls differ from superior substances inasmuch as the human soul's intellective power, by its very nature, must acquire its immaterial knowledge from the knowledge of material things attained through the senses.



d) Consequently the human soul's mode of existing can be known from its operation. For, inasmuch as the human soul has an operation transcending the material order, its act of existing transcends the body and does not depend on the body. Indeed, inasmuch as the soul is naturally capable of acquiring immaterial knowledge from material things, evidently its species can be complete only when it is united to a body. For a thing's species is complete only if it has the things necessary for the proper operation of the species. Consequently, if the human soul, inasmuch as it is united as a form to the body, has an act of existing which transcends the body and does not depend on it, obviously the soul itself is established on the boundary line dividing corporeal from separate substances. (From *The Soul*, trans. by John P. Rowan. Reprinted by permission of B. Herder Book Co., publishers.)

### III. INTERNAL SENSES AND EXTERNAL SENSES

(*Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 13, ca. medium)

In this article St. Thomas gives a synoptic description of the powers of the soul, ranging from the vegetative degree of life to that of the intellect. We have picked the portion relating to the four internal senses and the five external senses. The existence of these two distinct groups of faculties of sense knowledge, and the number in each, have in the first instance to be gathered from experience, so that if here, as is readily seen, St. Thomas evolves his classification in a priori fashion, he is not suggesting that this analytical or deductive presentation has no regard to experience. And if his analysis of the several modifications pertaining, each, to a distinctive type of sensory experience, should seem to smack of a bygone simplification, there can be no comparable demurring in respect of the basic and abiding dis-

inction, thoroughly made clear, between a strictly psychological response and its attendant bodily changes. The reader should note, moreover, that the Latin "immutatio," which signifies the qualitative alteration peculiar to a knowing subject, is rendered in the following selection by "modification." (Collate with *supra*, "The External Senses," p. 51, and "The Internal Senses, p. 69.)

a) Five things are required for the perfect sense knowledge which an animal should have. First, that sense receive species from sensible things, and this pertains to the proper sense. Secondly, that the animal make some judgment about the sensible qualities received, and distinguish them one from another, and this must be done by a power to which all sensible qualities extend. This power is called the "common sense." Thirdly, that the species of sensible things which have been received be retained. Now an animal needs to apprehend sensible things not only when they are present, but also after they have disappeared. And it is necessary that this also be attributed to some power. For in corporeal things there is one principle that receives, and another that retains, because things which are good recipients are sometimes poor retainers. This power is called imagination or "phantasy." In the fourth place, the animal must know certain intentions which sense [i.e., the external sense] does not apprehend, such as the harmful, the useful, and so on. Man, indeed, acquires a knowledge of these by investigation and by inference, but other animals, by a certain natural instinct. So, for example, the sheep flees naturally from the wolf as something harmful. Hence in animals other than man a natural estimative power is directed to this end, but in man there is a cogitative power which collates particular intentions. That is why it is called both particular reason and passive intellect [not to be confused with possible intellect, a spiritual power]. In the fifth place, it is necessary that those things which were first apprehended by

sense and conserved interiorly, be recalled again to actual consideration. This belongs to a memorative power, which operates without any investigation in the case of some animals, but with investigation and study in the case of men. Therefore in men there is not only memory but also reminiscence. Moreover it was necessary that a power distinct from the others be directed to this end, because the activity of the other sentient powers entails a movement from things to the soul, whereas the activity of the memorative power entails an opposite movement from the soul to things. But diverse movements require diverse motive principles, and motive principles are called powers.

b) Now because the proper sense, which is first in the order of sentient powers, is modified immediately by sensible objects, it was necessary for it to be divided into different powers in accordance with the diversity of sensible modifications. For the grade and order of modifications by which the senses are altered by sensible qualities, must be considered in relation to immaterial modifications, because sense is receptive of sensible species without matter. Hence there are some sensible objects whose species, although they are received immaterially in the senses, still cause a material modification in sentient animals. Now qualities which are also principles of change in material things are of this sort, for instance, hot and cold, wet and dry, and the like. Hence, because sensible qualities of this kind also modify us by acting upon us, and because material modification is made by contact, it was necessary that such sensible qualities be sensed by making contact with them. This is the reason why the sensory power experiencing such qualities is called touch.

However, there are some sensible qualities which do not, indeed, change us materially, although their modification has a material modification connected with it. This occurs in two ways. First, in this way, that the material modification affects the sensible quality as well as the one sensing. This pertains to taste. For, although the taste of a thing does not change the sense



organ by making it the tasted thing itself, nevertheless this modification does not occur without some change taking place in the thing tasted as well as in the organ of taste, and particularly as a result of moisture. Secondly, in this way, that the material modification affects the sensible quality alone. Now modification of this sort is caused either by a dissipation and alteration of the sensible object, as occurs, for instance, in the sense of smell, or by a local change only, as occurs in the case of hearing. So it is that hearing and smell sense not by contact with an object, but through an extrinsic medium, because they occur without a material modification on the side of the one sensing, although material modification does take place in the sensible object. But, taste senses by contact only, because it requires a material modification in the one sensing.

Furthermore, there are other sensible qualities which modify a sense without a material modification being involved, such as light and color, and the sense which apprehends these is sight. Hence sight is the noblest of all the senses and extends to more objects than the other senses, because the sensible qualities perceived by it are common both to corruptible and incorruptible bodies. (From *The Soul*, trans. by John P. Rowan. Reprinted by permission of B. Herder Book Co., publishers.)

#### IV. DIVISIONS OF APPETITE

(*De Veritate*, q. 25, a. 1, *ca. medium*)

Question 25 of *De Veritate* treats of "sensuality," meaning sensitive appetite. In the first article of the question St. Thomas gives a clear-cut explanation of the difference between: 1) natural appetite, 2) sensitive appetite, and 3) rational appetite or will. The importance of these notions justifies the inclusion of the present selection. (Collate with *supra*, "Divisions of Appetite," p. 80.)

Sense appetite stands midway between natural appetite and the higher, rational appetite, which is called will. This can be seen from the fact that in any object of appetite there are two aspects which can be considered: the thing itself which is desired, and the reason for its desirability, such as pleasure, utility, or something of the sort.

a) Natural appetite tends to the appetible thing itself without any apprehension of the reason for its appetibility; for natural appetite is nothing but an inclination and ordination of the thing to something else which is in keeping with it, like the ordination of a stone to a place below. But because a natural thing is determined in its natural existence, its inclination to some determined thing is a single one. Hence there is not required any apprehension by which an appetible thing is distinguished from one that is not appetible on the basis of the reason for its appetibility. But this apprehension is a prerequisite in the one who established the nature, who gave to each nature its own inclination to a thing in keeping with itself.

b) The higher appetite, the will, however, tends directly to the very reason for appetibility itself in an absolute way. Thus the will tends primarily and principally to goodness itself, or utility, or something like that. It tends to this or that appetible thing, however, secondarily, inasmuch as it shares in the above-mentioned reason. This is because a rational nature has a capacity so great that an inclination to one determinate thing would not be sufficient for it, but it has need of a number of different things. For that reason its inclination is to something common found in many things; and so by the apprehension of that common aspect it tends to the appetible thing in which it knows that this aspect is to be sought.

c) The lower appetite of the sensitive part, called sensuality, tends to the appetible thing itself as containing that which constitutes the reason for its appetibility. It does not tend to the reason for the appetibility in itself because the lower appetite

does not tend to goodness or utility or pleasure itself, but to this particular useful or pleasurable thing. In this respect the sense appetite is lower than the rational appetite. But because it does not tend only to this or only to that thing, but to every being which is useful or pleasurable to it, it is higher than natural appetite. For this reason it too has need of an apprehension by which to distinguish the pleasurable from what is not pleasurable.

It is a manifest sign of this distinction that natural appetite is under necessity in regard to the thing to which it tends, as a heavy body necessarily tends to a place downward; whereas sense appetite does not lie under any necessity in regard to a particular thing before it is apprehended under the aspect of the pleasurable or the useful, but of necessity goes out to it once it is apprehended as pleasurable (for a brute animal is unable, while looking at something pleasurable, not to desire it); but the will is under necessity in regard to goodness and utility itself (for man of necessity wills good), but is not under any necessity in regard to this or that particular thing, however much it may be apprehended as good or useful. This is so because each power has some kind of necessary relationship to its proper object.

From this it can be understood that the object of natural appetite is this thing inasmuch as it is of this particular kind; that of sense appetite is this thing inasmuch as it is agreeable or pleasurable (as water inasmuch as it is agreeable to taste, and not inasmuch as it is water); and the proper object of the will is good itself taken absolutely. (From *Truth*, III, trans. by Robert W. Schmidt, S.J. Reprinted by permission of Henry Regnery Company, publishers.)

## V. THE BASIS OF INTELLECTION

(*De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2)

St. Thomas' best passages on why some beings can know and others not, are found in his discussion of God's knowl-



edge. One of these passages occurs in the *Summa theologiae* (Ia, q. 14, a. 1), but the most explicit text, reproduced below, appears in the *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2. In its essentials the doctrine unfolded in these paragraphs traces back to Aristotle, who himself had understood that knowledge and knowableness go hand in hand with immateriality, and had defined knowledge as an event in which subject becomes object in a unique manner. St. Thomas, however, availing himself of certain contributions from Averroes, adds considerable depth and development to the Aristotelian account of the matter. (Collate with *supra*, "The Nature of Knowledge in General," p. 93.)

When it is said that a being knows itself, it is implicitly said to be both knower and the known. Hence, in order to consider what kind of knowledge God has of Himself, we have to see what kind of a nature it is that can be both knower and known.

Note, therefore, that a thing is perfect in two ways. First, it is perfect with respect to the perfection of its act of existence, which belongs to it according to its own species. But, since the specific act of existence of one thing is distinct from the specific act of existence of another, in every created thing of this kind, the perfection falls short of absolute perfection to the extent that that perfection is found in other species. Consequently, the perfection of each individual thing considered in itself is imperfect, being a part of the perfection of the entire universe, which arises from the sum total of the perfections of all individual things.

In order that there may be some remedy for this imperfection, another kind of perfection is to be found in created things. It consists in this, that the perfection belonging to one thing is found in another. This is the perfection of a knower in so far as he knows; for something is known by a knower by reason of the fact that the thing known is, in some fashion, in the possession

of the knower. Hence, it is said in *De Anima* (III, 5, 430 a 14) that the soul is, in some manner, all things, since its nature is such that it can know all things. In this way it is possible for the perfection of the entire universe to exist in one thing. The ultimate perfection which the soul can attain, therefore, is, according to the philosophers, to have delineated in it the entire order and causes of the universe. This they held to be the ultimate end of man. We, however, hold that it consists in the vision of God; for, as Gregory says, "What is there that they do not see who see Him who sees all things?" (*Dialogues*, IV, 33).

Moreover, the perfection of one thing cannot be in another according to the determined act of existence which it has in the thing itself. Hence, if we wish to consider it in so far as it can be in another, we must consider it apart from those things which determine it by their very nature. Now, since forms and perfections of things are made determinate by matter, a thing is knowable in so far as it is separated from matter. For this reason, the subject in which these perfections are received must be immaterial; for, if it were material, the perfection would be received in it according to a determinate act of existence. It would, accordingly, not be in the intellect in a state in which it is knowable, that is, in the way in which the perfection of one thing can be in another.

Hence, those ancient philosophers erred who asserted that like is known by like, meaning by this that the soul, which knows all things, is materially constituted of all things: its earth knows the earth, its water knows water, and so forth. They thought that the perfection of the thing known had the same determined act of existence in the knower as it has in its own nature. But the form of the thing known is not received in this way in the knower. As the Commentator remarks (*Averroes, In De Anima*, III, comm. 17 & 18), forms are not received in the possible intellect in the same way in which they are received in first matter, for a thing must be received by a knowing intellect in an immaterial way.

For this reason, we observe, a nature capable of knowing is found in things in proportion to their degree of immateriality. Plants and things inferior to plants can receive nothing in an immaterial way. Accordingly, they are entirely lacking in the power of knowing, as is clear from *De Anima* (II, 424 a 32 ff.). A sense, however, can receive species without matter although still under the conditions of matter; but the intellect receives its species entirely purified of such conditions.

There is likewise a hierarchy among knowable things; for, as the Commentator says (*In Metaph.*, II, comm. 1), material things are intelligible only because we make them intelligible; they are merely potentially intelligible and are made actually intelligible by the light of the agent intellect, just as colors are made actually visible by the light of the sun. But immaterial things are intelligible in themselves. Hence, although less known to us, they are better known in the order of nature.

Since God, being entirely free of all potentiality, is at the extreme of separation from matter, it follows that He is most knowing and most knowable. (From *Truth*, I, trans. by Robert W. Mulligan, S.J. Reprinted by permission of Henry Regnery Company, publishers.)

## VI. THE HUMAN INTELLECT IS AN ABSTRACTIVE FACULTY

(Ia, q. 85, a. 1)

The corner stone in the Aristotelian doctrine of intellectual knowledge is the theory of abstraction, for in this theory lies the answer to the crucial problem regarding the origin of such knowledge and its relationship to sense knowledge. The importance of this theory is reason enough for presenting the complete text—objections, body, and replies—of the above-indicated article of the *Summa theologiae*, which is a *locus classicus* to the discussion. Meriting



particular attention are the reply to the first objection, which explains the difference between abstraction relevant to judgment and abstraction attendant on simple apprehension; and the reply to the second objection, which defines the degrees of abstraction. (Collate with *supra*, "Definition of the Proper Object of the Human Intellect," p. 111.)

*Whether Our Intellect Understands Corporeal  
and Material Things by Abstraction  
from Phantasms?*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that our intellect does not understand corporeal and material things by abstraction from the phantasms. For the intellect is false if it understands an object otherwise than as it really is. Now the forms of material things do not exist as abstracted from the particular things represented by the phantasms. Therefore, if we understand material things by abstraction of the species from the phantasm, there will be error in the intellect.

*Obj. 2.* Further, material things are those natural things which include matter in their definition. But nothing can be understood apart from that which enters into its definition. Therefore material things cannot be understood apart from matter. Now matter is the principle of individualization. Therefore material things cannot be understood by abstraction of the universal from the particular, which is the process through which the intelligible species is abstracted from the phantasm.

*Obj. 3.* Further, the Philosopher says (*De Anima*, III, 7, 431 a 15 ff.) that the phantasm is to the intellectual soul what color is to the sight. But seeing is not caused by abstraction of species from color, but by color impressing itself on the sight. Therefore neither does the act of understanding take place by abstraction

of something from the phantasm, but by the phantasm impressing itself on the intellect.

*Obj. 4.* Further, the Philosopher says (*De Anima*, III, 5, 430 a 13 ff.) there are two things in the intellectual soul—the passive intellect and the active intellect. But it does not belong to the passive intellect to abstract the intelligible species from the phantasm, but to receive them when abstracted. Neither does it seem to be the function of the active intellect, which is related to the phantasm as light is to color; since light does not abstract anything from color, but rather streams on to it. Therefore in no way do we understand by abstraction from phantasms.

*Obj. 5.* Further, the Philosopher says (*ibid.*, 7, 431 b 1 ff.) that the intellect understands the species in the phantasm; and not, therefore, by abstraction.

*On the contrary*, the Philosopher says (*ibid.*, 4, 439 a 5 ff.) that things are intelligible in proportion as they are separable from matter. Therefore material things must needs be understood according as they are abstracted from matter and from material images, namely, phantasms.

*I answer that*, as stated above (Q. 84, a. 7), the object of knowledge is proportionate to the power of knowledge. Now there are three grades of the cognitive powers. For one cognitive power, namely, the sense, is the act of a corporeal organ. And therefore the object of every sensitive power is a form as existing in corporeal matter. And since such matter is the principle of individuality, therefore every power of the sensitive part can have knowledge only of the individual. There is another grade of cognitive power which is neither the act of a corporeal organ, nor in any way connected with corporeal matter; such is the angelic intellect, the object of whose cognitive power is therefore a form existing apart from matter: for though angels know material things, yet they do not know them save in something immaterial, namely, either in themselves or in God. But the human intellect holds a middle place: for it is not the act of

an organ, yet it is a power of the soul which is the form of the body, as is clear from what we have said above (Q. 76, a. 1). And therefore it is proper to it to know a form existing individually in corporeal matter, but not as existing in this individual matter. But to know what is in individual matter, not as existing in such matter, is to abstract the form from individual matter which is represented by the phantasms. Therefore we must needs say that our intellect understands material things by abstracting from the phantasms; and through material things thus considered we acquire some knowledge of immaterial things, just as, on the contrary, angels know material things through the immaterial.

But Plato, considering only the immateriality of the human intellect, and not its being in a way united to the body, held that the objects of the intellect are separate ideas; and that we understand not by abstraction, but by participating things abstract, as stated above (Q. 84, a. 1).

*Reply Obj. 1.* Abstraction may occur in two ways: First, by way of composition and division; thus we may understand that one thing does not exist in some other, or that it is separate therefrom. Secondly, by way of simple and absolute consideration; thus we understand one thing without considering the other. Thus for the intellect to abstract, one from another, things which are not really abstract from one another, does, in the first mode of abstraction, imply falsehood. But, in the second mode of abstraction, for the intellect to abstract things which are not really abstract from one another, does not involve falsehood, as clearly appears in the case of the senses. For if we understood or said that color is not in a colored body, or that it is separate from it, there would be error in this opinion or assertion. But if we consider color and its properties, without reference to the apple which is colored; or if we express in word what we thus understand, there is no error in such an opinion



or assertion, because an apple is not essential to color, and therefore color can be understood independently of the apple. Likewise, the things which belong to the species of a material thing, such as a stone, or a man, or a horse, can be thought of apart from the individualizing principles which do not belong to the notion of the species. This is what we mean by abstracting the universal from the particular, or the intelligible species from the phantasm; that is, by considering the nature of the species apart from its individual qualities represented by the phantasms. If, therefore, the intellect is said to be false when it understands a thing otherwise than as it is, that is so, if the word *otherwise* refers to the thing understood; for the intellect is false when it understands a thing otherwise than as it is; and so the intellect would be false if it abstracted the species of a stone from its matter in such a way as to regard the species as not existing in matter, as Plato held. But it is not so, if the word *otherwise* be taken as referring to the one who understands. For it is quite true that the mode of understanding, in one who understands, is not the same as the mode of a thing in existing: since the thing understood is immaterially in the one who understands, according to the mode of the intellect, and not materially, according to the mode of a material thing.

*Reply Obj. 2.* Some have thought that the species of a natural thing is a form only, and that matter is not part of the species. If that were so, matter would not enter into the definition of natural things. Therefore it must be said otherwise, that matter is twofold, common, and *signate* or individual; common, such as flesh and bone; and individual, as this flesh and these bones. The intellect therefore abstracts the species of a natural thing from the individual sensible matter, but not from the common sensible matter; for example, it abstracts the species of man from *this flesh* and *these bones*, which do not belong to the species as such, but to the individual [cf. *Metaph.* E, 1, 1025 b 32 ff.],

and need not be considered in the species: whereas the species of man cannot be abstracted by the intellect from *flesh* and *bones*.

Mathematical species, however, can be abstracted by the intellect from sensible matter, not only from individual, but also from common matter; not from common intelligible matter, but only from individual [intelligible] matter. For sensible matter is corporeal matter as subject to sensible qualities, such as being cold or hot, hard or soft, and the like: while intelligible matter is substance as subject to quantity. Now it is manifest that quantity is in substance before other sensible qualities are. Hence quantities, such as number, dimension, and figures, which are the terminations of quantity, can be considered apart from sensible qualities; and this is to abstract them from sensible matter; but they cannot be considered without understanding the substance which is subject to the quantity; for that would be to abstract them from common intelligible matter. Yet they can be considered apart from this or that substance; for that is to abstract them from individual intelligible matter. But some things can be abstracted even from common intelligible matter, such as *being*, *unity*, *power*, *act*, and the like; all these can exist without matter, as is plain regarding immaterial things. Because Plato failed to consider the twofold kind of abstraction, as above explained (*ad* 1), he held that all those things which we have stated to be abstracted by the intellect, are abstract in reality.

*Reply Obj. 3.* Colors, as being in individual corporeal matter, have the same mode of existence as the power of sight: and therefore they can impress their own image on the eye. But phantasms, since they are images of individuals, and exist in corporeal organs, have not the same mode of existence as the human intellect, and therefore have not the power of themselves to make an impression on the passive intellect. This is done by the power of the active intellect, which by turning towards the phantasm produces in the passive intellect a certain likeness

which represents, as to its specific conditions only, the thing reflected in the phantasm. It is thus that the intelligible species is said to be abstracted from the phantasm; not that the identical form which previously was in the phantasm is subsequently in the passive intellect, as a body transferred from one place to another.

*Reply Obj. 4.* Not only does the active intellect throw light on the phantasm; it does more; by its own power it abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasm. It throws light on the phantasm, because, just as the sensitive part acquires a greater power by its conjunction with the intellectual part, so by the power of the active intellect the phantasms are made more fit for the abstraction therefrom of intelligible intentions. Furthermore, the active intellect abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasm, forasmuch as by the power of the active intellect we are able to disregard the conditions of individuality, and to take into our consideration the specific nature, the image of which informs the passive intellect.

*Reply Obj. 5.* Our intellect both abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasms, inasmuch as it considers the natures of things in universal, and, nevertheless, understands these natures in the phantasms, since it cannot understand even the things of which it abstracts the species, without turning to the phantasms, as we have said above (Q. 84, a. 7). (Reprinted from *The Summa Theologica* with the permission of Benziger Brothers, Inc., publishers and copyright owners.)

## VII. THE AGENT INTELLECT

The following readings on the agent intellect may be taken simply as a further development of the preceding article. The point is that if there is to be abstraction, the soul needs to have an active power of intellect which can refine, as it were, the sensible object of its material condi



tions and so bring it to the necessary level of immateriality. This is the burden of the first passage (A), which presents the body of article 4 of the *Quaestio Disputata de Anima*. It will be remembered, however, that Aristotle's remarks on the active power of the intellect were not altogether conclusive in meaning, so that succeeding commentators debated whether the agent intellect was separate and, in consequence, one for all men. Indeed, most of them before St. Thomas, it will also be recalled, answered in the affirmative. For many reasons St. Thomas could not subscribe to such an interpretation; and his discussion of the matter is set forth in the second passage (B), taken from article 5 of the same question on the soul. It should be mentioned, moreover, that the principal target of his comments in article 5 is Avicenna, according to whom the agent intellect, the lowest of the separate intelligences, was the immediate source and giver not only of natural forms to terrestrial bodies, but also of their corresponding intelligible forms or species to the possible intellect of man. (Collate with *supra*, "The Agent Intellect and the Abstraction of the Intelligible Species," p. 123.)

#### A. *The Existence of the Agent Intellect*

(*Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 4)

I answer: We must admit that an agent intellect exists. To make this evident we must observe that, since the possible intellect is in potency to intelligibles, the intelligibles themselves must move [i.e., actuate] the possible intellect. But that which is nonexistent cannot move anything. Moreover, the intelligible as such, that which the possible intellect understands, does not exist in reality; for our possible intellect understands something

as though it were a one-in-many and common to many [i.e., universal]. However, such an entity is not found subsisting in reality, as Aristotle proves in the *Metaphysics* (Z [VII], 13, 1038 b 8 ff.). Therefore, if the possible intellect has to be moved by an intelligible, this intelligible must be produced by an intellectual power. And since it is impossible that what exists should be in potency in regard to something produced by it, we must admit that an agent intellect exists, in addition to the possible intellect, and that this agent intellect causes the actual intelligibles which actuate the possible intellect. Moreover, it produces these intelligibles by abstracting them from matter and from material conditions which are the principles of individuation. And since the nature as such of the species does not possess these principles by which the nature is given a multiple existence among different things, because individuating principles of this sort are distinct from the nature itself, the intellect will be able to receive this nature apart from all material conditions, and consequently will receive it as a unity [i.e., as a one-in-many]. For the same reason the intellect receives the nature of a genus by abstracting from specific differences, so that it is a one-in-many and common to many species.

However, if universals subsisted in reality in virtue of themselves, as the Platonists maintained, it would not be necessary to admit that an agent intellect exists; because things which are intelligible in virtue of their own nature move the possible intellect. Therefore it appears that Aristotle was led by this necessity to posit an agent intellect, because he did not agree with the opinion of Plato on the question of Ideas. Nevertheless there are some subsistent things in the real order which are actual intelligibles in virtue of themselves; the immaterial substances, for instance, are of this nature. However, the possible intellect cannot attain a knowledge of these immediately, but acquires its knowledge of them through what it abstracts from material and sensible things. (From *The Soul*, trans. by John

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*B. The Agent Intellect Is Neither Separate Nor One and the Same for All*

(*Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 5)

I answer: It is obviously more reasonable to maintain that the agent intellect is unique and separate, than to hold that this is true of the possible intellect. For the possible intellect, in virtue of which we are capable of understanding, is sometimes in potency and sometimes in act. The agent intellect, on the other hand, is that which makes us actually understanding. Now an agent exists in separation from the things which it brings into actuality, but obviously whatever makes a thing potential is wholly within that thing.

a) *Contrary opinions.*—For this reason many maintained that the agent intellect is a separate substance, and that the possible intellect is a part of our soul. Furthermore they held that this agent intellect is a specific kind of separate substance, which they call an intelligence. They held that it is related to our souls, and to the entire sphere of active and passive qualities [i.e., the terrestrial sphere], as superior separate substances (which they also call intelligences) are related to the souls of the celestial bodies (for they considered these to be animated), and to the celestial bodies themselves. Hence they maintained that, as superior bodies receive their motion from these separate substances, and the souls of the heavenly bodies their intelligible perfections, so also do all the bodies of this inferior sphere receive their forms and movements from the separate agent intellect, while our soul receives its intelligible perfections from it. But because the Catholic faith maintains that God is the agent operating in nature and in our souls, and not some separate substance, some Catholics asserted that the agent intellect



is God Himself, who is "the true Light that enlightens every man who comes into this world" (John 1:9).

b) 1st *refutation*.—But this position, if anyone examines it carefully, is seen to be implausible, because the superior substances are related to our souls as celestial bodies are to inferior bodies. For, as the powers of superior bodies are certain universal active principles in relation to inferior bodies, so also are the divine power and the powers of different secondary substances (if the latter do influence us in any way) related to our souls as universal active principles.

However, we see that there must exist in addition to the universal active principles of the celestial bodies, certain particular active principles which are powers of inferior bodies, limited to the proper operation of each and every one of them. This is particularly necessary in the case of perfect animals, because certain imperfect animals are found, for whose production the power of a celestial body suffices, as is evident in the case of animals generated from decomposed matter. However, in the generation of perfect animals a special power is also required in addition to the celestial power, and this power is present in the seed. Therefore, since intellectual operation is the most perfect thing existing in the entire order of inferior bodies, we need in addition to universal active principles (namely, the power of God enlightening us, or the powers of any other separate substance) an active principle existing within us by which we are enabled to understand actually. This power is the agent intellect.

c) 2nd *refutation*.—We must also consider this, that if the agent intellect is held to exist as a separate substance along with God, a consequence repugnant to our faith will follow: namely, that our ultimate perfection and happiness consist not in a certain union of our soul with God, as the Gospel teaches, saying: "This is life eternal, that you may know the true God" (John 17:3), but with some other separate substance. For it is

evident that man's ultimate beatitude or happiness depends upon his noblest operation, intellection, which operation, in order to be fully completed, requires the union of our possible intellect with its active principle. For, indeed, anything passive in any way whatever is perfected [i.e., fully actuated] only when joined with the proper active principle which is the cause of its perfection. Therefore those maintaining that the agent intellect is a substance existing apart from matter, say that man's ultimate happiness consists in being able to know the agent intellect.

d) 3rd *refutation*.—Moreover, if we give the matter further careful consideration, we shall find that the agent intellect cannot be a separate substance for the same reason that the possible intellect cannot be, as was shown (cf. arts. 1, 2, and 3). For, as the operation of the possible intellect consists in receiving intelligible [species], so also does the proper operation of the agent intellect consist in abstracting them, for it makes them actually intelligible in this way. Now we experience both of these operations in ourselves, because we receive our intelligible species, and abstract them as well. However, in anything that operates there must be some formal principle whereby it operates formally, because a thing cannot operate formally through something that possesses existence distinct from itself. But, although the motive principle of an activity [i.e., an efficient cause] is separate from the thing which it causes, nevertheless there must be some intrinsic principle whereby a thing operates formally, whether it be a form or some sort of impression. Therefore there must exist within us a formal principle through which we receive intelligible species, and one whereby we abstract them. These principles are called the possible and the agent intellect respectively. Consequently each exists within us. Moreover, [the formal intrinsic existence in us of the agent intellect] is not accounted for simply by the fact that the action of the agent

intellect, namely, the abstracting of intelligible species, is carried out through phantasms illumined in us by its action. For every object produced by art is the effect of the action of an artificer, the agent intellect being related to the phantasms illumined by it as an artificer is to the things made by his art.

d) *Coexistence in the soul of both intellects*.—Now it is not difficult to see how both of these can be present in one and the same substance of the soul: that is, the possible intellect, which is in potency to all intelligible objects, and the agent intellect which makes them actually intelligible; because it is not impossible for a thing to be in potency and in act with respect to one and the same thing in different ways. Therefore, if we consider the phantasms themselves in relation to the human soul, in one respect they are found to be in potency, inasmuch as they are not abstracted from individuating conditions, although capable of being abstracted. In another respect they are found to be in act in relation to the soul, namely, inasmuch as they are [sensible] likenesses of determinate things. Therefore potentiality with respect to phantasms must be found within our soul so far as these phantasms are representative of determinate things. This belongs to the possible intellect which is, by its very nature, in potency to all intelligible objects, but is actuated by this or that object through species abstracted from phantasms. Our soul must also possess some active immaterial power which abstracts the phantasms themselves from material individuating conditions. This belongs to the agent intellect, so that it is, as it were, a power participated from the superior substance, God. Hence the Philosopher says (*De Anima*, III, 5, 430 a 16), that the agent intellect is like a certain habit and light. In the Psalms it is also said: "The light of Thy countenance is signed upon us, O Lord" (Ps. 4:7). Something resembling this in a certain degree is apparent in animals who see by night. The pupils of their eyes are in potency to every color



inasmuch as they have no one determinate color actually, but make colors actually visible in some way by means of a certain innate light.

f) *Last opinion*.—Indeed, some men thought that the agent intellect does not differ from our *habitus* of indemonstrable principles. But this cannot be the case, because we certainly know indemonstrable principles by abstracting them from singulars, as the Philosopher teaches in the *Posterior Analytics* (II, 19, 100 b 4). Consequently, the agent intellect must exist prior to the *habitus* of first indemonstrable principles in order to be the cause of it. Indeed, the principles themselves are related to the agent intellect as certain of its instruments, because it makes other things actually intelligible by means of such principles. (From *The Soul*, trans. by John P. Rowan. Reprinted, with minor changes, by permission of B. Herder Book Co., publishers.)

## VIII: THE ROLE OF THE SPECIES IN INTELECTION

(Ia, q. 85, a. 2)

The notion of species, or likeness of the thing known, is one of the essential elements in the Aristotelian doctrine of knowledge. The intelligible species is abstracted by the agent intellect from the phantasm, in which it exists in potency, and is received in the faculty of knowledge, which is the possible (or passive) intellect. This likeness of the thing, however, is not that which is known immediately (*id quod*), but that by which (*id quo*) the intellect knows. Correctly understood, therefore, the species not only precludes every form of subjectivism but is the only alternative to a subjectivist or idealist theory of knowledge. Indeed, the following article from the *Summa* is one of the capital

texts on which Thomistic epistemology rests its defense of the immediacy or objectivity of knowledge. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this article does not treat every phase of the question relating to the term of knowledge, since the knowledge process also admits of a term that is immanent to the mind, namely, the mental word. (Collate with *supra*, "The Possible Intellect and the Reception of the Species," p. 134, and "The Mental Word: Relative or Ultimate Term of Knowledge?" p. 148.)

*Whether the Intelligible Species Abstracted  
from the Phantasm Is Related to Our  
Intellect As That Which Is  
Understood?*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that the intelligible species abstracted from the phantasm is related to our intellect as that which is understood. For the understood in act is in the one who understands, since the understood in act is the intellect itself in act. But nothing of what is understood is in the intellect actually understanding, save the abstracted intelligible species. Therefore this species is what is actually understood.

*Obj. 2.* Further, what is actually understood must be in something; else it would be nothing. But it is not in something outside the soul: for, since what is outside the soul is material, nothing therein can be actually understood. Therefore what is actually understood is in the intellect. Consequently, it can be nothing else than the aforesaid intelligible species.

*Obj. 3.* Further, the Philosopher says (*Perihermeneias*, 1, 16 a 3, 7) that words are signs of the passions of the soul. But words signify the things understood, for we express by word what we understand. Therefore these passions of the soul, viz., the intelligible species, are what is actually understood.

*On the contrary*, the intelligible species is to the intellect what the sensible image is to the sense. But the sensible image is not what is perceived, but rather that by which sense perceives. Therefore the intelligible species is not what is actually understood, but that by which the intellect understands.

*I answer that*, some have asserted that our faculties of knowledge know only the impression made on them; as, for example, that sense is cognizant only of the impression made on its own organ. According to this theory, the intellect understands only its own impression, namely, the intelligible species which it has received, so that this species is what is understood.

This is, however, manifestly false for two reasons. First, because the things we understand are the objects of science; therefore if what we understand is merely the intelligible species in the soul, it would follow that every science would not be concerned with objects outside the soul, but only with the intelligible species within the soul; thus, according to the teaching of the Platonists all science is about ideas, which they held to be actually understood. Secondly, it is untrue, because it would lead to the opinion of the ancients who maintained that *whatever seems, is true*, and that consequently contradictories are true simultaneously. For if the faculty knows its own impression only, it can judge of that only. Now a thing seems, according to the impression made on the cognitive faculty. Consequently the cognitive faculty will always judge of its own impression as such; and so every judgment will be true: for instance, if taste perceived only its own impression, when anyone with a healthy taste perceives that honey is sweet, he would judge truly; and if anyone with a corrupt taste perceives that honey is bitter, this would be equally true; for each would judge according to the impression on his taste. Thus every opinion would be equally true; in fact, every sort of apprehension.

Therefore it must be said that the intelligible species is related to the intellect as that by which it understands: which is proved



thus. There is a twofold action (cf. *Metaph.* Θ, 8, 1050 a 23–1050 b 1), one which remains in the agent; for instance, to see and to understand; and another which passes into an external object; for instance, to heat and to cut; and each of these actions proceeds in virtue of some form. And as the form from which proceeds an act tending to something external is the likeness of the object of the action, as heat in the heater is a likeness of the thing heated; so the form from which proceeds an action remaining in the agent is the likeness of the object. Hence that by which the sight sees is the likeness of the visible thing; and the likeness of the thing understood, that is, the intelligible species, is the form by which the intellect understands.

But since the intellect reflects upon itself, by such reflection it understands both its own act of intelligence, and the species by which it understands. Thus the intelligible species is that which is understood secondarily; but that which is primarily understood is the object, of which the species is the likeness.

This also appears from the opinion of the ancient philosophers, who said that like is known by like. For they said that the soul knows the earth outside itself by the earth within itself; and so of the rest. If, therefore, we take the species of the earth instead of the earth, according to Aristotle (*De Anima*, III, 8, 431 b 30), who says that a stone is not in the soul, but only the likeness of the stone, it follows that the soul knows external things by means of its intelligible species.

*Reply Obj.* 1. The thing understood is in the intellect by its own likeness; and it is in this sense that we say that the thing actually understood is the intellect in act, because the likeness of the thing understood is the form of the intellect, as the likeness of a sensible thing is the form of the sense in act. Hence it does not follow that the intelligible species abstracted is what is actually understood; but rather that it is the likeness thereof.

*Reply Obj.* 2. In the words *the thing actually understood* there is a double implication: the thing which is understood, and the

fact that it is understood. In like manner the words *abstract universal* imply two things: the nature of a thing and its abstraction or universality. Therefore the nature itself to which it occurs to be understood, abstracted or considered as universal is only in individuals; but that it is understood, abstracted or considered as universal is in the intellect. We see something similar to this in the senses. For the sight sees the color of the apple apart from its smell. If therefore it be asked where is the color which is seen apart from the smell, it is quite clear that the color which is seen is only in the apple; but that it be perceived apart from the smell, this is owing to the sight, forasmuch as the faculty of sight receives the likeness of color and not of smell. In like manner humanity understood is only in this or that man; but that humanity be apprehended without conditions of individuality, that is, that it be abstracted and consequently considered as universal, occurs to humanity inasmuch as it is brought under the consideration of the intellect, in which there is a likeness of the specific nature, but not of the principles of individuality.

*Reply Obj. 3.* There are two operations in the sensitive part. One, in regard of impression only, and thus the operation of the senses takes place by the senses being impressed by the sensible. The other is formation, inasmuch as the imagination forms for itself an image of an absent thing, or even of something never seen. Both of these operations are found in the intellect. For in the first place there is the passion of the passive intellect as informed by the intelligible species; and then the passive intellect thus informed forms a definition, or a division, or a composition, expressed by a word. Wherefore the concept conveyed by a word is its definition; and a proposition conveys the intellect's division or composition. Words do not therefore signify the intelligible species themselves; but that which the intellect forms for itself for the purpose of judging of external things. (Reprinted from *The Summa Theologica* with the per-

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## IX. THE MENTAL WORD

(*De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 1, *ca. medium*)

St. Thomas' discussions of the mental word usually occur in connection with and in elucidation of his theology of the Trinity. As here understood, the mental word is a term, or terminating point, of the intellectual process, immanent and apprehended objectively, that is, as the object of the intellect. Needless to say, the doctrine of a mental word in human knowledge requires careful handling. The following passage from the *De Potentia* occurs in the discussion on the Trinitarian relations; in it St. Thomas summarizes his whole comprehension of the matter with pleasing adroitness. (Collate with *supra*, "The Mental Word," p. 143.)

The one who understands may have a relation to four things in understanding: namely to the thing understood, to the intelligible species whereby his intelligence is made actual, to his act of understanding, and to his intellectual concept.

This concept differs from the three others. It differs from the thing understood, for the latter is sometimes outside the intellect, whereas the intellectual concept is only in the intellect. Moreover the intellectual concept is ordered to the thing understood as its end, inasmuch as the intellect forms its concept thereof that it may know the thing understood. It differs from the intelligible species, because the latter which makes the intellect actual is considered as the principle of the intellect's act, since every agent acts forasmuch as it is actual: and it is made actual by a form, which is necessary as a principle of action. And it differs from the act of the intellect, because it is



considered as the term of the action, and as something effected thereby. For the intellect by its action forms a definition of the thing, or even an affirmative or negative proposition.

This intellectual concept in us is called properly a word, because it is this that is signified by the word of mouth. For the external utterance does not signify the intellect itself, nor the intelligible species, nor the act of the intellect, but the concept of the intellect by means of which it relates to the thing.

Accordingly this concept or word by which our intellect understands a thing distinct from itself originates from another and represents another. It originates from the intellect through an act of the intellect; and it is the likeness of the thing understood. Now when the intellect understands itself this same word or concept is its progeny and likeness, that is of the intellect understanding itself. And this happens because the effect is like its cause in respect of its form, and the form of the intellect is the thing understood. Wherefore the word that originates from the intellect is the likeness of the thing understood, whether this be the intellect itself or something else. And this word of our intellect is extrinsic to the essence of the intellect (for it is not the essence but a kind of passion thereof), yet it is not extrinsic to the intellect's act of intelligence, since this act cannot be complete without it. (From *On the Power of God*, trans. by the English Dominican Fathers. Reprinted by permission of The Newman Press, publishers.)

## X. THE KNOWLEDGE OF SINGULARS

(*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 5)

The proper object of the human intellect is the abstract and universal nature of individual material things, the direct and singular knowledge of which pertains to the sense faculties. It does not follow, however, that our intellect has no knowledge whatsoever of the singular; indeed, the testimony of experience would seem to be conclusively in favor

of such knowledge. This, too, is the view sustained by St. Thomas, noting, however, that human intellectual knowledge of the singular is only indirect and reflexive. (Collate with *supra*, "Knowledge of the Singular and the Existent Thing," p. 165.)

As is clear from what has been said (q. 10, a. 4), human and angelic minds know material things in different ways. For the cognition of the human mind is directed, first, to material things according to their form, and, second, to matter in so far as it is correlative to form. However, just as every form is of itself universal, so correlation to form makes us know matter only by universal knowledge. Matter thus considered is not the principle of individuation. Designated matter, existing under definite dimensions and considered as singular, is, rather, that principle because form receives its individuation from such matter. For this reason the Philosopher says that the parts of man are matter and form taken generally, whereas the parts of Socrates are this form and this matter (*Metaph. Z*, 11, 1037 a 5-10).

From this it is clear that our mind is not able directly to know singulars, for we know singulars directly through our sensitive powers which receive forms from things into a bodily organ. In this way, our senses receive them under determined dimensions and as a source of knowledge of the material singular. For, just as a universal form leads to the knowledge of matter in general, so an individual form leads to the knowledge of designated matter which is the principle of individuation.

Nevertheless, the mind has contact with singulars by reason of something else in so far as it has continuity with the sensitive powers which have particulars for their object. This conjunction comes about in two ways. First, the movement of the sensitive part terminates in the mind, as happens in the movement that goes from things to the soul. Thus, the mind knows singulars through a certain kind of reflection, as when the mind, in

knowing its object, which is some universal nature, returns to knowledge of its own act, then to the species which is the principle of its act, and, finally, to the phantasm from which it has abstracted the species. In this way, it attains to some knowledge about singulars.

In the other way, this conjunction is found in the movement from the soul to things, which begins from the mind and moves forward to the sensitive part in the mind's control over the lower powers. Here, the mind has contact with singulars through the mediation of particular reason, a power of the sensitive part, which joins and divides individual intentional likenesses, which is also known as the cogitative power, and which has a definite bodily organ, a cell in the center of the head. The mind's universal judgment about things to be done cannot be applied to a particular act except through the mediation of some intermediate power which perceives the singular. In this way, there is framed a kind of syllogism whose major premise is universal, the decision of the mind, and whose minor premise is singular, a perception of the particular reason. The conclusion is the choice of the singular work, as is clear in *The Soul* (III, 11, 434 a 16-20).

The angelic mind, since it knows material things through forms that immediately refer to matter as well as to form, knows by direct vision not only matter in general, but also matter as singular. So, also, does the divine mind. (From *Truth*, II, trans. by James V. McGlynn, S.J. Reprinted by permission of Henry Regnery Company, publishers.)

## XI. THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SOUL THROUGH ITSELF

(*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8)

For an accurate account of St. Thomas' doctrine on this important but easily misread problem, not only does one



have to collate a number of texts, but even more necessary is it to keep in mind the larger setting which happens to form the context to a given passage. The essential conclusions explicitly or implicitly evolved by St. Thomas on this topic have already been pointed out in the expository part of our study, to which the reader is hereby referred (cf. *supra*, "The Knowledge of the Soul Through Itself," p. 176). As for the present selection, in the second part (b) St. Thomas appears to be especially occupied with bringing into agreement his own views and the Augustinian formulas relative to knowledge "in the eternal truths." For our purpose we have deemed it sufficient to cite but a portion of this particular discussion, enough to indicate the general distinction underlying his train of thought.

When we ask if something is known through its essence, we can understand the question in two ways. In the first, "through its essence" is taken to refer to the thing known, so that we understand that a thing is known through its essence when its essence is known, and that it is not known through its essence when not its essence but only certain of its accidents are known. In the second way, it is taken to refer to that by which something is known, so that we thus understand that something is known through its essence because the essence itself is that by which it is known. It is in this sense that we ask here if the soul understands itself through its essence.

For a clear understanding of this question we should observe that each person can have a twofold knowledge of the soul, as Augustine says (*De Trinit.*, IX, 4). One of these is the knowledge by which the soul of each man knows itself only with reference to that which is proper to it. The other is that by which the soul is known with reference to that which is common to all souls. This latter, which concerns all souls without dis-

tion, is that by which the nature of the soul is known. However, the knowledge which each has of his soul, in so far as it is proper to himself, is the knowledge of the soul as it exists in this individual. Thus, it is through this knowledge that one knows whether the soul exists, as when someone perceives that he has a soul. Through the other type of knowledge, however, one knows what the soul is and what its proper accidents are.

a) With reference to the first type of cognition we must make a distinction, because one can know something habitually or actually. Concerning the actual cognition by which one actually considers that he has a soul, I say that the soul is known through its acts. For one perceives that he has a soul, that he lives, and that he exists, because he perceives that he senses, understands, and carries on other vital activities of this sort. For this reason, the Philosopher says (*Ethica Nicomachea*, IX, 9, 1170 a 31 ff.) that we sense that we sense, and we understand that we understand, and because we sense this, we understand that we exist. But one perceives that he understands only from the fact that he understands something. For to understand something is prior to understanding that one understands. Therefore, through that which it understands or senses, the soul arrives at actual perception of the fact that it exists.

Concerning habitual knowledge I say this, that the soul sees itself through its essence, that is, the soul has the power to enter upon actual cognition of itself from the very fact that its essence is present to it. This is like the case of one who, because he has the habit of some knowledge, can by reason of the presence of the habit perceive those things which fall under that habit. But no habit is required for the soul's perception of its existence and its advertence to the activity within it. The essence alone of the soul, which is present to the mind, is enough for this, for the acts in which it is actually perceived proceed from it.

b) But, if we speak of the knowledge of the soul when the

human mind is limited to specific or generic knowledge, we must make another distinction. For the concurrence of two elements, apprehension and judgment about the thing apprehended, is necessary for knowledge. Therefore, the knowledge by which the nature of the soul is known can be considered with reference to apprehension and with reference to judgment. If, then, we consider this knowledge with reference to apprehension, I say that we know the nature of the soul through species which we abstract from the sense . . . [Here follows an argument establishing the immateriality of the soul.]

But, if we consider the knowledge which we have of the soul in the judgment by which we decide that it exists in such a way, as we had apprehended from the deduction mentioned above, we have knowledge of the soul inasmuch as "we contemplate inviolable truth. This is the truth from which we define to the best of our power not the kind of mind each man has, but the kind of mind it ought to be according to eternal norms," as Augustine says (*De Trinitate*, IX, 6). (From *Truth*, II, trans. by James V. McGlynn, S.J. Reprinted by permission of Henry Regnery Company, publishers.)

## XII. THE SEPARATED SOUL'S KNOWLEDGE

(*Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 15 corp.)

Offhand, it may appear that the question of the separated soul's manner of knowing is of no interest to the psychologist; in reality, however, it is a rich source of doctrine for anyone who, like St. Thomas, wants to penetrate to the core of human nature. If the focal problem of human psychology is that of the union of body and soul, the ultimate reason for this union is never better realized than when we search, as far as we can, the separated soul's manner of knowing. The basic reason is found on investigation to



be that without the body the human spirit's knowledge of things, apart from supernatural infusion, could not be as complete and as perfect as it is now. In the present instance, moreover, by his forerunning analysis, closely reasoned and manfully pressed, of the theories taught by the Platonists and Avicenna, St. Thomas makes us doubly sure that his adoption of the Aristotelian solution was not without thoroughgoing knowledge of the whys and the wherefores. (Collate with *supra*, "The Case of the Separated Soul," p. 185.)

*Whether the Soul, When Separated from  
the Body, Is Capable of Understanding*

I answer: The fact that our soul in its present condition needs sensible things in order to understand, is the cause of the difficulty encountered in solving the problem raised in this article. Therefore, to solve this problem, we must consider the various explanations for this need [of sensible things] that have been proposed.

a) *Theory of the Platonists*.—For, some men (namely, the Platonists) have maintained that in order for the soul to understand it does not need the senses essentially (*per se*), as though knowledge were caused in us by the senses, but only accidentally inasmuch as our soul is stirred by the senses to recollect things which it knew in a previous existence, and of which it possesses a knowledge naturally endowed. To account for this mode of understanding Plato held that the species of things subsisted apart from them, and were actually intelligible entities. He called them "Ideas" and maintained that our soul knows and understands by participating in them, and by some kind of infusion. Moreover, according to Plato, the soul, prior to its union with the body, was able to use this knowledge freely, but

as a result of that union it was so weighed down by the body, and somehow smothered by it, that it seemed to have forgotten the things it had previously known and of which it had possessed connatural knowledge. They also maintained that the soul was in some way stimulated by the senses so that it turned back upon itself and recollected those things which it previously knew and of which it had innate knowledge; just as it sometimes happens that our sense experiences are the occasion for our recollecting vividly certain things which we seemed to have forgotten.

This position of Plato on knowledge and on sense objects conforms with his position on the generation of natural things. For he held that the forms of natural things, through which each individual is placed in its proper species, result from a participation in the "Ideas" aforementioned, so that the sole function of inferior agents is to dispose matter for participation in the separated species.

Now if this theory be adopted, the whole problem with which we are dealing becomes simple and easy. For according to this view the soul does not by its essence (*secundum suam naturam*) require sensible things in order to understand; it requires them only accidentally (*per accidens*), and this accidental need ceases to exist as soon as the soul is separated from the body. For the body having ceased to weigh upon the soul, the soul will then have no need of the stimulus of sense. Existing by itself the soul will be, as it were, lightly clad and on the alert for all knowledge.

Now, according to this theory it appears that no explanation can be offered as to why the soul is united to the body. For [according to the Platonic view under consideration] this union is not for the sake of the soul, because when the soul is not united to the body it can still exercise perfectly its own proper operation, whereas its proper operation is impeded by its union with the body. Similarly, according to this view, it cannot be

argued that the union of soul and body exists for the sake of the body; for the soul does not exist for the sake of the body, but rather the body for the soul, because the soul is nobler than the body. Then, too, it seems incongruous that the soul should suffer a loss in its own operation for the sake of ennobling the body. It also seems to follow from this view that the union of the soul with the body is not natural, for whatever is natural to a thing does not impede the operation proper to that thing. Hence, if union with a body impeded the soul's understanding, it would not be natural but contrary to the nature of the soul to be united to a body; and in that case man, who is constituted of a soul united to a body, would not be a natural being; which seems absurd. Likewise, experience shows that our knowledge is not the result of participation in separated species, but is acquired from sensible things, because those who lack one sense, lack knowledge of the sensible things apprehended by that sense; just as a person born blind cannot have a knowledge of colors.

b) *Avicenna's Theory*.—Now there is another theory according to which the senses are not accidentally serviceable to the human soul in performing its function of understanding (as the theory just dealt with supposes), but essentially; not in order that we may acquire knowledge from sense objects, but because the senses dispose the soul for acquiring knowledge from some other source. This is the opinion of Avicenna. For Avicenna maintains that there is a certain separate substance which he calls the intellect or the "Agent Intellect," that the intelligible species through which we understand flow into our intellect from this Agent Intellect, and that by the operation of the sentient part, the imagination and other things of this sort, our intellect is prepared for orientating itself toward the Agent Intellect and for receiving the influx of intelligible species from it. This theory agrees with Avicenna's view on the generation of natural things; for he maintains that all substantial forms flow



from the Agent Intellect, and that natural agents only dispose the matter for receiving forms from the Agent Intellect.

According to this position, as in the preceding, this question seems to involve little or no difficulty. For if the senses are necessary for understanding only inasmuch as they dispose the soul to receive species from the Agent Intellect, because our soul is thus orientated toward the latter, then when the soul is separated from the body it will be orientated toward the Agent Intellect by itself alone, and will receive intelligible species from that Intellect. Thus the soul will have no need of the senses in order to understand; just as the ship in which a person has crossed the sea is no longer needed by him after the completion of the voyage.

Now it seems to follow from this view, that a man immediately acquires all knowledge, both of things which he perceives by his senses and of other things. For if we understand through species which flow into our minds from an Agent Intellect, and if all that is required for the reception of this infusion is the orientating of our soul toward this Intellect, then whenever the soul is orientated it will be able to receive the infusion of any and every sort of intelligible species; because in that case it cannot be said that the soul is orientated toward the Agent Intellect with respect to one species and not with respect to another; and thus a person born blind will, by imagining sounds, be able to acquire a knowledge of colors, or of any other sensible object; which is manifestly false.

It is also evident that we have need of the sentient powers for understanding, not only in the acquisition of knowledge but also in the utilization of knowledge already acquired. For we cannot even reflect upon things we know without turning to phantasms, although Avicenna himself is of a contrary opinion. It is for this reason that, even in reflecting upon things which it knows, the soul is impeded in its operation by injuries to the organs of the sentient powers whereby the phantasms are re-

tained and apprehended. It is evident also that we have need of certain phantasms in things divinely revealed to us through the influence of superior substances. Thus Dionysius says (*De cael. hier.*, I, 2): "The divine light cannot shine upon us unless it is screened round about by many sacred veils." Now this would not be so if we needed phantasms only to orientate us toward superior substances.

c) *Aristotle's Theory*.—Consequently a different explanation must be given for the need which the soul has of sensory powers in order to understand. For they are not accidental in the manner of stimuli, as Plato held, nor are they merely dispositive, as Avicenna claimed, but represent to the intellective soul its proper object, as Aristotle says in the *De Anima* (III, 7, 429 a 17): "Phantasms are to the intellect what sensible things are to sense." Now just as colors are made actually visible by light, so phantasms are made actually intelligible only by the agent intellect. This agrees with what we hold about the generation of natural things. For, as we maintain that superior agents produce natural forms by means of natural agents, so we maintain that the agent intellect produces knowledge in our possible intellect through phantasms rendered actually intelligible by the agent intellect. The question whether the agent intellect is a separate substance, as some held, or a light in which our soul participates in the manner of superior substances, has no bearing on this last point.

Now according to this latter theory it seems even more difficult to see how the separated soul can understand. For [on that hypothesis] there will be no phantasms, which require corporeal organs for their apprehension and retention. Yet if these be removed, it is seen that the soul cannot understand; just as the faculty of sight cannot function in the absence of colors. Now in order to solve this problem the fact must be borne in mind that the soul, since it is lowest in the order of intellectual substances, participates in intellectual light or in intellectual

nature, in the lowest and weakest measure. For in the first intelligence, namely, God, intellectual nature is so powerful that He understands all things through one intelligible form, namely, His own essence. Inferior intellectual substances, on the other hand, understand through many species; and the higher each of these substances is, the fewer forms it possesses, and the more potent is its faculty of understanding all things through those few forms. However, even if an inferior intellectual substance possessed forms equally as universal as those of a superior substance, its knowledge would still remain incomplete, since it does not have so great a power of understanding, because that inferior intellectual substance would only know things universally; and, from the few universal forms it apprehends, it could not bring its knowledge to bear on singulars.

Therefore, if the human soul, which is lowest in the order of intellectual substances and hence possesses the least intellectual power of them all, received forms so abstractly and universally as separate substances do, then it would have a most imperfect kind of knowledge: that of knowing things in the universal and indistinctly. Hence, in order that the soul's knowledge may be perfect in its kind and bear directly upon singulars, the soul must acquire a knowledge of truth from singular things. However, the light of the agent intellect is necessary in order that those things may be received in the soul and may exist there in a higher mode than that in which they exist materially. Hence it was necessary that the soul be united to a body for the perfection of its intellectual operation.

It is undoubtedly true, however, that bodily movements and the activity of the senses prevent the soul from receiving infused knowledge from separate substances. It is for this reason that certain things are revealed to persons during sleep, and to those who have [momentarily] lost their senses. Therefore, when the soul shall be separated completely from the body, it will be able to receive infused knowledge from superior sub-



stances more fully, so that thanks to such knowledge, it will be able to understand without a phantasm, which otherwise it cannot do. Nevertheless, an influx of this sort will not produce knowledge as perfect and as directly related to singulars as the knowledge which we acquire here below through the senses, though a much more perfect knowledge will be had in addition to this natural influx by those souls that will enjoy the influx of a supernatural light by which they will know all things most fully and will see God Himself. Moreover, separated souls will have a determinate knowledge of those things which they had previously known here below, and whose intelligible species they retain in themselves. (From *The Soul*, trans. by John P. Rowan. Reprinted, with slight revisions, by permission of B. Herder Book Co., publishers.)

### XIII. SUPERIORITY OF INTELLECT OVER WILL

(*De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 11 corp.)

Without a doubt, the affirmation of the intellect's superiority over the will ranks as one of the doctrines that give St. Thomas' philosophy its proper originality. For all that, however, this doctrine, as we have seen, permits of some important qualifications in favor of the relative superiority of the will, in consequence of which the intellectualism of St. Thomas appears rather less stringent than is sometimes alleged or imagined. (Collate with *supra*, "Superiority of Intellect over Will," p. 202.)

A thing can be said to be more eminent than another either simply or in a certain respect. For something to be shown to be simply better than another the comparison must be made on the basis of what is essential to them and not on that of accidents. In the latter case one thing would be shown to stand

out over another merely in a certain respect. Thus if a man were to be compared to a lion on the basis of essential differences, he would be found to be simply nobler inasmuch as the man is a rational animal, the lion irrational. But if a lion is compared to a man on the basis of physical strength, he surpasses the man. But this is to be nobler only in a certain respect. To see, then, which of these two powers, the will or the intellect, is better without qualification, we must consider the matter from their essential differences.

The perfection and dignity of the intellect consists in this, that the species of the thing which is understood is in the intellect itself, since in this way it actually understands, and from this its whole dignity is seen. The nobility of the will and of its act, however, consists in this, that the soul is directed to some noble thing in the very existence which that thing has in itself. Now it is more perfect, simply and absolutely speaking, to have within oneself the nobility of another thing than to be related to a noble thing outside oneself. Hence, if the will and the intellect are considered absolutely, and not with reference to this or that particular thing, they have this order, that the intellect is simply more excellent than the will.

But it may happen that to be related in some way to some noble thing is more excellent than to have its nobility within oneself. This is the case, for instance, when the nobility of that thing is possessed in a way much inferior to that in which the thing has it within itself. But if the nobility of one thing is in another just as nobly or more nobly than it is in the thing to which it belongs, then without doubt that which has the nobility of that thing within itself is nobler than that which is related in any way whatsoever to that noble thing. Now the intellect takes on the forms of things superior to the soul in a way inferior to that which they have in the things themselves; for the intellect receives things after its own fashion, as is said in *The Causes*. And for the same reason the forms of things inferior to

the soul, such as corporeal things, are more noble in the soul than in the things themselves.

The intellect can accordingly be compared to the will in three ways: (1) Absolutely and in general, without any reference to this or that particular thing. In this way the intellect is more excellent than the will, just as it is more perfect to possess what there is of dignity in a thing than merely to be related to its nobility. (2) With regard to material and sensible things. In this way again the intellect is simply nobler than the will. For example, to know a stone intellectually is nobler than to will it, because the form of the stone is in the intellect, inasmuch as it is known by the intellect in a nobler way than it is in itself as desired by the will. (3) With reference to divine things, which are superior to the soul. In this way to will is more excellent than to understand, as to will God or to love Him is more excellent than to know Him. This is because the divine goodness itself is more perfectly in God Himself as He is desired by the will than the participated goodness is in us as known by the intellect. (From *Truth*, III, trans. by Robert W. Schmidt, S.J. Reprinted by permission of Henry Regnery Company, publishers.)

#### XIV. MAN HAS FREE WILL

(*De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 1 corp.)

St. Thomas discusses free will on a great many occasions in his writings. The following selection from *De Veritate* is perhaps more memorable than some others because it places the discussion of the will on a more comprehensive level by comparing the several kinds of principles of movement found in nature as a whole. Also, it throws a sharp focus on the real source of freedom in man, namely, his dominion over his practical judgment. Man, in the final analysis, has free will because, and in so far as, he owns the



power to judge his judgment, and hence to decide what he will or will not do. (Collate with *supra*, "Free Will," p. 208.)

Without any doubt it must be affirmed that man is endowed with free choice. The faith obliges us to this, since without free choice there cannot be merit and demerit, or just punishment and reward. Clear indications, from which it appears that man freely chooses one thing and refuses another, also lead us to this. Evident reasoning also forces us to this conclusion. Tracing out by its means the origin of free choice for the purposes of our investigation, we shall proceed as follows.

a) Among things which are moved or which act in any way, this difference is found. Some have within themselves the principle of their motion or operation; and some have it outside themselves, as is the case with those which are moved violently, "in which the principle is outside and the being subjected to the violence contributes nothing," as the Philosopher teaches (*Eth. Nic.*, III, 1, 1110 a 1-3, b 1-4, 15-16). We cannot hold free choice to be in the latter inasmuch as they are not the cause of their own motion, whereas a free being is "that which is for its own sake," as the Philosopher teaches (*Metaph.*, A, 2, 982 b 26).

b) Among the things whose principle of motion and activity is within themselves some are such as to move themselves, as animals; but there are some which do not move themselves even though they do have within themselves some principle of their motion, as heavy and light things. These do not move themselves because they cannot be distinguished into two parts, of which one does the moving and the other is moved, as happens in animals. Their motion is nevertheless consequent upon a principle within them, their form. Because they have this from the being which generated them, they are said to be moved essentially by their genitor and accidentally by that which re-

moves an obstacle, according to the Philosopher (*Phys.*, VIII, 4, 255 b 8–256 a 3). These are moved by means of themselves but not by themselves. Hence free choice is not found in these either, because they are not their own cause of acting and moving but are set to acting or moving by something which they have received from another.

c) Among those beings which are moved by themselves, the motions of some come from a rational judgment; those of others, from a natural judgment. Men act and are moved by a rational judgment, for they deliberate about what is to be done. But all brutes act and are moved by a natural judgment. This is evident from the fact that all brutes of the same species work in the same way, as all swallows build their nests alike. It is also evident from the fact that they have judgment in regard to some definite action, but not in regard to all. Thus bees have skill at making nothing but honeycombs; and the same is true of other animals.

It is accordingly apparent to anyone who considers the matter aright that judgment about what is to be done is attributed to brute animals in the same way as motion and action are attributed to inanimate natural bodies. Just as heavy and light bodies do not move themselves so as to be by that fact the cause of their own motion, so too brutes do not judge about their own judgment but follow the judgment implanted in them by God. Thus they are not the cause of their own decision nor do they have freedom of choice. But man, judging about his course of action by the power of reason, can also judge about his own decision inasmuch as he knows the meaning of an end and of a means to an end, and the relationship of the one with reference to the other. Thus he is his own cause not only in moving but also in judging. He is therefore endowed with free choice—that is to say, with a free judgment about acting or not acting. (From *Truth*, III, trans. by Robert W. Schmidt, S.J. Reprinted,

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## XV. THE HUMAN SOUL IS IMMORTAL

(*Quaest. Disp. de Anima*, a. 14 corp.)

In this article St. Thomas gives a well-rounded presentation of the formal argument for the immortality, or, more precisely, for the incorruptibility of the human soul. Briefly, being an operation that in itself is completely independent of the body and every bodily organ, intellection requires that its ultimate principle, the soul, be similarly free of all bodily admixture. This principle, then, is form without body. But substantial form without body cannot but be subsistent and hence incorruptible. To this formal demonstration, which is basic, St. Thomas adds two other indications of immortality by way of auxiliary proofs. (Collate with *supra*, "The Nature of the Human Soul," p. 224.)

It must necessarily be granted that the human soul is incorruptible. In proof of this we must take into consideration the fact that whatever belongs to a thing in virtue of its very nature (*per se*), cannot be taken away from it; for example, animality cannot be taken away from man, nor can the even and odd be taken away from number. Moreover it is evident that the act of existing in itself is a result of a form, for everything has its act of existing from its proper form; wherefore its act of existing can in no way be separated from its form. Therefore things composed of matter and form are corrupted by losing the form that gives them their act of existing. Moreover a form itself cannot be corrupted in itself (*per se*), but is corrupted accidentally as a result of the disintegration of the composite,



inasmuch as the composite, which exists in virtue of its form, ceases to exist as a composite. This, indeed, is the case if the form is one that does not have an act of existing in itself, but is merely that by which a composite exists.

Now if there is a form having an act of existing in itself, then that form must be incorruptible. For a thing having an act of existing (*esse*) does not cease to exist unless its form is separated from it. Hence if the thing having an act of existing is itself a form, it is impossible for its act of existing to be separated from it. Now it is evident that the principle by which a man understands is a form having its act of existing in itself and is not merely that by which something exists. For, as the Philosopher proves in *De Anima* (III, 4, 429 a 24), intellection is not an act executed by any bodily organ. The main reason why there is no bodily organ capable of receiving the sensible forms of all natural things is that the recipient must itself be deprived of the nature of the thing received; just as the pupil of the eye does not possess the color that it sees. Now every bodily organ possesses a sensible nature. But the intellect, by which we understand, is capable of apprehending all sensible natures. Therefore its operation, namely, understanding, cannot be carried out by a bodily organ. Thus it is clear that the intellect has an operation of its own in which the body does not share. Now a thing operates in accordance with its nature (*secundum quod est*), for things that exist of themselves have an operation of their own, whereas things that do not exist of themselves have no operation of their own. For example, heat in itself does not produce warmth, but something hot. Consequently it is evident that the intellectual principle, by which man understands, has its own mode of existing superior to that of the body and not dependent upon it.

It is also evident that an intellectual principle of this sort is not a thing composed of matter and form, because the species of things are received in it in an absolutely immaterial way, as

is shown by the fact that the intellect knows universals, which are considered in abstraction from matter and from material conditions. The sole conclusion to be drawn from all this, then, is that the intellective principle, by which man understands, is a form having its act of existing in itself. Therefore this principle must be incorruptible. This indeed agrees with the Philosopher's dictum that the intellect is something divine and everlasting (*De Anima*, III, 5, 430 a 23). Now it was shown in preceding articles (arts. 2, 5) that the intellective principle, by which man understands, is not a substance existing apart from man but is something formally inhering in him which is either the soul or a part of the soul. Thus, from the foregoing considerations we conclude that the human soul is incorruptible.

Now all those who held that the human soul is corruptible missed some of the points we have already made. Some of these people, holding that the soul is a body, declared that it is not a form in its entirety, but a thing composed of matter and form. Others held that the intellect does not differ from the senses, and so they declared that the intellect does not operate except through a bodily organ; that it does not have a higher mode of existence than that of the body, and, therefore, that it is not a form having an act of existing in its own right. Still others held that the intellect, by which man understands, is a separate substance. But the falsity of all these opinions has been demonstrated in preceding articles. It therefore remains that the human soul is incorruptible.

Two additional arguments can be considered as an indication of this: First, respecting the intellect itself, because we see that even those things which are corruptible in themselves are incorruptible so far as they are perceived by the intellect. For the intellect apprehends things in and through universal concepts, and things existing in this [universalized conceptual] mode are not subject to corruption. Secondly, the natural appetite also provides an argument for the incorruptibility of the soul. Natu-

ral appetite cannot be frustrated. Now we observe in men the desire for perpetual existence. This desire is grounded in reason. For to exist (*esse*) being desirable in itself, an intelligent being who apprehends existence in the absolute sense, and not merely the here and now, must desire existence in the absolute sense and for all time. Hence it is clear that this desire is not vain, but that man, in respect of his intellective soul, is incorruptible. (From *The Soul*, trans. by John P. Rowan. Reprinted, with one minor variation, by permission of B. Herder Book Co., publishers.)

## XVI. THE IMAGE OF GOD

God created man to His own image. Following the example of his Christian masters, St. Thomas meditated deeply on this sacred utterance, believing, rightly, that it could provide him with further clue to the inner reality of the human soul. As will be seen in the passages to follow, this image in the soul is manifold, since it may shadow forth both the divine nature (*qua* intellectual nature) and the trinity of Persons in God. (Collate with *supra*, "The soul as image of God," p. 231.)

### A. *The Image of God According to His Nature*

(Ia, q. 93, a. 4 *corp.*)

Since man is said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is the most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature. Now the intellectual nature imitates God chiefly in this, that God understands and loves Himself. Wherefore we see that the image of God is in man in three ways. First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding



and loving God; and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly, inasmuch as man actually or habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory. Wherefore on the words, *The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us* (Ps. iv, 7), the gloss distinguishes a threefold image, of *creation*, of *re-creation*, and of *likeness*. The first is found in all men, the second only in the just, and the third only in the blessed. (Reprinted from *The Summa Theologica* with the permission of Benziger Brothers, Inc., publishers and copyright owners.)

### *B. The Image of God According to the Trinity of Persons*

(*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 3 corp.)

Augustine affirms (*De Trinitate*, XIV, c. 7) that the intellectual soul possesses the image of the Trinity in two ways: first, according to these three, *mind*, *knowledge*, and *love* (cf. *De Trinitate*, IX, c. 4); secondly, according to these three, *memory*, *understanding*, and *will*. Accordingly, we must say that the image of the Trinity in the soul can be predicated in two ways: one in which there is perfect imitation of the Trinity, the other in which the imitation is imperfect.

For the mind perfectly imitates the Trinity in this, that it actually remembers, actually understands, and actually wills. This is so because in the uncreated Trinity the middle Person is the Word. Now, there can be a word only with actual cognition. Hence, it is according to this kind of perfect imitation that Augustine puts the image in memory, understanding, and will. In it, memory refers to habitual knowledge, understanding

to actual cognition which proceeds from the habitual knowledge of memory, and will to the actual movement of will which proceeds from thought. . . .

We have the image in which there is imperfect imitation when we designate it according to habits and powers. It is thus that Augustine bases the image of the Trinity in the soul upon mind, knowledge, and love (*De Trinitate*, IX, c. 4). Here, mind means the power; knowledge and love, the habits existing in it. (From *Truth*, II, trans. by James V. McGlynn, S.J. Reprinted, with the first paragraph slightly modified, by permission of Henry Regnery Company, publishers.)

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